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Memory, Monuments and the South African National Imaginary: Constitution Hill and the Fiction of Ivan Vladislavić

By

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DECLARATION

This research has not been previously accepted for any degree and is not being currently considered for any other degree at any other university.

I declare that this Dissertation contains my own work except where specifically acknowledged

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an examination of public culture and memory sites in post-apartheid South Africa, in relation to their narrativisation in the fiction of the South African writer Ivan Vladislavić, who evinces a creolized, ludic style. The carnivalesque elements at play in his writing and his use of "minoritised" English constitute a radical aesthetic. With reference to poststructuralist theories of language, representation and history, I examine short stories and a novel by Vladislavić. I then turn a grammar developed from this aesthetic to an examination of one of post-apartheid South Africa's most symbolically rich memory sites: Constitution Hill in Johannesburg. Official spaces in this country and in this era have tended to be built and curated in the interests of establishing a national imaginary based on a teleological understanding of apartheid history. This can be problematic, as I show in a brief discussion of the Apartheid Museum, a site that offers an instructive comparison with Constitution Hill. I argue that Vladislavić's radical aesthetic provides a way to interrogate the more totalizing discourses of nationhood and citizenship of the post-Rainbow Nation. Vladislavić's refusal to allow an authentic history and his radical aesthetics of representation constitute an iconoclasm that can be brought to bear on the more totalizing aspects of Constitution Hill's design.

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<u>1. INTRODUCTION</u>

In this dissertation, I contend that liberal democratic ideology in South Africa continues in some part at least to be based on the ideas of multi-culturalism and non-racialism that can collectively be referred to as ‘Rainbow Nation’ ideology. This ideology has public, official support despite the emergence of competing discourses at state level, such as former president Thabo Mbeki’s brand of Africanism. The Rainbow Nation is putatively the basis still of official public discourse and continues to colour opinion about South Africa’s past and future in the media and in society generally. Elites in this country have tended to promote a Rainbow Nation ideology in order to create a unified nation state out of the people divided under apartheid’s radically segregationist legislation. This is partly in the interests of creating a stable environment for international investment, on which the government is depending for its neo-liberal model of industrialization and the capitalist ‘development’ of the country. While state discourse itself may be a battleground in which multiple discourses contend, those in charge of mediating public culture, in museums, monuments and bureaucratic buildings, have generally put together their exhibitions and architecture in order to establish a public culture built on a teleological narrative of liberation that evinces, among other things, an authentic history of the anti-apartheid struggle and a reification of tradition.

I wish to discuss representations of post-apartheid society through Ivan Vladislavić’s narrative engagement with spatiality, identity and museumisation, as well as a ‘reading’ of a significant architectural post-apartheid monument, Constitution Hill. I argue that Ivan Vladislavić’s radical aesthetic and “devolving” use of English (in Stefan Helgesson’s terms [2004]) provide a way to interrogate the more totalizing discourses of nationhood and citizenship in the post-Rainbow

Nation. I illustrate this with reference to Constitution Hill. My argument has at its centre the assertion that Vladislavić's refusal to allow an authentic history and his radical notions of representation constitute an iconoclastic aesthetic that can be brought to bear on the more troubling aspects of Constitution Hill's design. I also feel that the links between this iconoclastic aesthetic and Vladislavić's awareness and evocation of the material environments in his work have been neglected in previous criticism. This study is intended to go some way to redressing this omission.

1.1. Writing since Apartheid

In the mid-1990s, there was much debate among writers and cultural critics about the future of writing in South Africa. Under the *ancien regime*, the political had become enforcedly the personal in the creative milieu, with apartheid the "main theme" of writing (Attwell and Harlow, 2000, p3); but as apartheid ended and the edifice against which writing (and theatre and fine art) was directed crumbled, it seemed there was to be an aesthetic crisis. As Attwell and Harlow put it: "There were predictions of an impasse, and of the end of literary careers built on the diagnosis of apartheid's ills or the celebration of resistance to it" (p3). This echoes the predictions of Rob Nixon who, writing in 1996, foretold that: "In retrospect, apartheid might appear, as a prod to creativity, to have been a kind of solution; the crimes of apartheid served as a kind of *litterature engagee*" (Nixon cited in Irlam, 2004, p698).

However, Attwell and Harlow continue, "If these misgivings imply that South African writers were likely to fall silent before the uncertainties of the time, that prediction has not been fulfilled. Writers have been challenged, but they have not fallen silent" (p3). Writing in 2000, they were

already able to say that the much-vaunted 'New South Africa' was already failing the rhetoric that hailed its advent. They give as examples a culture of violence and deep economic inequality that are still entrenched — burgeoning, in fact. That post-apartheid South Africa should be faced with a divisiveness of its own is not surprising, given the pathological legacy of apartheid, and given the difficulty of creating a public culture in a country so diverse. As Shaun Irlam puts it, the "dual and difficult invitation to embrace unity and celebrate difference … has imprinted the decade since the end of apartheid" (p698). This quotation refers directly to the exhortations of Archbishop Desmond Tutu to South Africans to build a society that embraces unity while celebrating difference, which I think encapsulates the official rhetoric of the Rainbow Nation (a phrase generally attributed to Tutu himself): a rhetoric at odds with the discourses of ethnocentrism and the great disparities of privilege that are at the root of the failures of SA's new democracy.

Njabulo Ndebele was a major influence on how writers and academics began to see the role that culture could play in the new South Africa. In essays such as "The Rediscovery of the Ordinary" (1991), Ndebele called for a richer literature that broke with the constraints of apartheid, constraints that were not imposed by the regime but were self-imposed on the imagination of the artist by the imperative of liberation. For Ndebele, the commitment to political engagement that characterized most apartheid writing impoverished it, so that it became more journalism than storytelling[1]. Ndebele exhorted writers to rediscover the ordinary, to re-valourise the quotidian

[1] Walter Benjamin drew a similar distinction between storytelling and journalism, or 'experience and information'. The latter is the form of narrative in alienated societies, an ephemeral form the value of which 'does not survive the moment it was new' (1970, p90). For Benjamin, information is incommensurable with collective social memory (p98).

and give new relevance to African indigenous culture. The ordinary is actually more activist than the spectacular, he argued.

Writers and artists in this country, then, have been faced with a whole new set of problems with which to grapple, and perhaps in a more nuanced, 'ordinary' way. Since the official ending of apartheid, writers in this country have attempted new and innovative ways of conceptualizing politics, history and identity. Writing has become more hybrid as cultures meet and engage with one another on a newly 'horizontal' (rather than vertical, top-down) plane. Irlam (2004) has a corresponding but perhaps less optimistic view of post-apartheid writing. He sees the situation not as a rebirth of polyphony, but as a new era of marginality. Writing in the post-apartheid era, he argues, is characterized by a dominant trope of liminality and separation. Rob Nixon foresaw this, he says: 'The post apartheid era, [Nixon] foretold, would render the activist role of the writer irrelevant and leave the writer marginal to the new national agendas. This prediction has been borne out in a kind of willed marginalization enacted in much new fiction" (p698). This marginalization is a symptom of a new sort of 'laager mentality' by which groups, once united against the common cause of apartheid, now feel the need to assert their own separate identity. South Africans have become more assertive of their identities as coloured, say, or Khoi-San, and withdrawn into these identities, with the result that this country has often become a far more divisive place than it was under apartheid. This period has also perhaps given rise to new strains of white writing, as white writers increasingly feel their voices are sidelined in mainstream media and culture.

Irlam's view is not incommensurate with the idea of a South African renaissance, however: hybridity and creolisation are liminal forms of identity. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin describe marginality as "the condition constructed by the posited relation to a privileged centre … But the abrogation of that centre does not involve the construction of … a new centre" (1989, p104). Vladislavić's writing is intentionally marginal. His mercurial style abrogates any centre or monolithic discourse. This is, in my opinion, a strength because it resists the replacing of one orthodoxy with another.

In their introduction to *Senses of Culture: South African Culture Studies* (2000) editors Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Ann Michael call for an 'opening up' in thinking about South Africa after apartheid. They argue that South Africa, now and before, has been written about as a closed, separate space, distinct from the rest of Africa, somehow not part of the decolonization processes of other countries and different from their postcolonial contexts. They are critical of the liberation narrative, which has tended towards the "over-determination of the political, the inflation of resistance and the fixation on … racial supremacy and racial victimhood as a determinant of identity" (Nuttall and Michael, 2000, p2). Culture and identity have always been more fluid in this country than has been allowed for in writing, though they were certainly restricted by apartheid and then by the "oversimplified discourse of rainbow nationalism" (p1). New theorizing on writing and culture in this country needs to take cognizance of how South Africa is part of the world, they argue; while thought and criticism in this country have opened up, they have not necessarily decompressed.

1.2. Ivan Vladislavić and the Iconoclastic Use of Language

I review these perspectives here because, though diverse, they all point to a phenomenon of writing since the transition: a diffusion of identity, a parallel process of separation in South African society and its cultural production, and a contingent opening up of space for hybrid forms. This is in contrast to a political rhetoric that attempts, even now that the ANC government is firmly ensconced as the ruling party, to promote a national identity that is unified yet embraces multi-culturalism, based on a history of liberation. In this study, I intend to show how Ivan Vladislavić's radical aesthetic — a creolized, polyphonic, devolving writing — criticizes narrow definitions of history and identity. His style is diffuse in that it constantly refuses to take a firm political position in the manner demanded by writing in the apartheid era; and it incorporates all manner of voice and discourse (such as satire and advertising jargon). In doing so, I shall site my argument in relation to the work of other critics who have noted these tendencies, but I shall also be attempting partially to fill a gap in the literature surrounding Vladislavić's *oeuvre*: there has been a lack of emphasis on material space in his work that is surprising considering the general academic interest in the study of space and identity and the interest Vladislavić himself shows in architectonics. Shane Graham is the only critic I have encountered who has written to address this gap (Graham, 2007). There is also a special issue of *Scrutiny 2* (2006) devoted to criticism of *The Exploded View* that offers some pointers in this regard. In that novel, the city as semioscape is much more at the forefront of Vladislavić's concerns.

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I contend that Vladislavić's writing fulfils Ndebele's call for a return to the ordinary. His engagement with the material and the quotidian does not detract from his engagement with

social, economic and political realities of South Africa, and his refusal to adopt any kind of monolithic political standpoint makes this engagement all the more potent. Throughout Vladislavić's work, his interest in history, language, art and architecture are apparent and intersecting. His writing is very aware of the fabric of capitalist existence; it draws on a miasma of *objets trouvés* and delves into the real environment of the city and the relationships of the people who live there, principally of commerce and movement. As Vladislavić says of *Portrait with Keys* (2006): "The book is about Jo'burg and what-what, about life in the city and other things — home, habit, change, memory, mortality, friendship, ghosts, gardens, walking, falling, selling, stealing. It is a partial account of my life in my neighbourhood, a selective self-portrait. It's a bit like a map that shows only the side streets" (Vladislavić, 2006, n.pag). His writing is a *bricolage*, created from an assortment of language and images from his environment. All cultural production is arguably *bricole*, but Vladislavić takes an aesthetic pleasure in foregrounding this.

In the conceptual categorizations proposed by Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, Vladislavić's writing is centrifugal; that is, it has a decentring impulse, pushing away from absolutes and truths, which are hallmarks of claims to authority. In his essay "Discourse in the Novel" (1935), Bakhtin notes the operation of power through language. For Bakhtin, language is not merely a "system of abstract grammatical categories" (1935, p665), but rather is intrinsically ideological. As such, it has a political provenance and function, and this function is a profoundly conservative one. Monologic attitudes to language function to keep it 'official', to keep power in the centre of society, which decides norms and rules. Thus, it privileges forms of discourse that abrogate diversity, pluralism and so on. Language is what is spoken and the speaker stands in a simple, unmediated, 'bipolar' relationship to his or her utterances. Monologic utterances, says

Bakhtin, "*are the forces that serve to unify and centralize the verbal-ideological world* … [original emphasis] A unitary language … is opposed to the realities of heteroglossia [and] makes its real presence felt as a force for overcoming this heteroglossia … and crystallizing into a real … unity, the unity of the reigning conversational (everyday) and literary language, 'correct language'" (1935, p667).

Bakhtin calls these forces "centripetal", a term borrowed from the physical sciences denoting a force that pulls objects towards a centre: in this context, a unifying, centralizing force. But monologia is only one aspect of the immense and almost infinite variety of languages — not just different tongues (French, English, isiZulu and so on), but the variety of what one could call speech communities: different industries, generations, subcultures and so on; or as Bakhtin puts it, "the fleeting language of a day, of an epoch, a social group, a genre, a school" (1935, p668). This he refers to as heteroglossia, which encompasses all language. Some forms of heteroglossia are associated with 'low' genres and have "been consciously opposed to literary language. It was parodic and aimed sharply and polemically against the official languages of its given time" (1935, p668). Such polyvocal utterances are therefore centrifugal, and function to decentralize. They are of course inifinitely more numerous than centripetal discourses.

Vladislavić's writing, then, is also liminal, hybrid and anarchic and therefore iconoclastic. The works I shall discuss in this study include three stories published in *Propaganda by Monuments and Other Stories* (1996) — the eponymous story, "The Whites Only Bench" and "The Omniscope Pat. Pending" — as well as his novel *The Restless Supermarket* (2000). I shall examine each under the rubric of Vladislavić's iconoclasm, how he negotiates and interrogates

nation, public memory, identity and claims to an authentic history, in order to show how his representational aesthetics constantly engage with totalizing narratives. I shall then link this to a discussion of Constitution Hill.

1.3. Constitution Hill

South Africa's new Constitutional Court was mostly completed in 2004, and stands almost in the centre of Johannesburg on the site of the Old Fort, a site steeped in colonial and post-apartheid history. The Old Fort was built by Paul Kruger as a prison in 1893 and used variously as such and as a fort. During apartheid, it was used as a prison and was referred to as Number Four, after the section housing black men. Here, pass book offenders and political prisoners (Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela among them) were incarcerated alongside murderers. The site therefore has many connotations of a traumatic past. As Lauren Segal says in the introduction to *Number Four*, one of the many coffee table-style books that have appeared on the court and its architecture: "At least one member of almost every family living in the townships around the city disappeared into Number Four for a period of time and many heartbreaking stories are told of the horrors that took place there." (Segal, 2006, p1). The Old Fort ceased to operate as a prison in 1983 and stood derelict until the mid-1990s, when it was felt that it would be a powerfully symbolic site on which to build South Africa's new Constitutional Court. The designers were a young, local team of architects whose proposal won a competition that was open to entries from all over the world.

Constitution Hill includes the offices of the court and of related non-governmental bodies. It is built on an open plan designed to encourage traverse. It is situated right next to Hillbrow, so as to

signal its availability to those historically alienated from the law. It is also a monument to the men and women incarcerated there over the decades, whose voices are preserved in a number of ways, including the preservation of graffiti in the solitary confinement cells. It is, therefore, government space, public space, museum and monument, all in one campus.

As public space and public monument, Constitution Hill is a conduit for a shared South African visual culture, an attempt on the part of certain sectors of civil society, government, heritage authorities and so on, to engineer a new "imagined community", in Benedict Anderson's terms (1983), one that all South Africans share, despite racial, cultural and religious differences. Monuments are amongst the many elements of the "visual and material manifestations of new public histories [that] are both produced by and effectively inform changing definitions of 'community' and 'nation' during periods of political transition where such concepts become crucial stakes in the resolution and management of social conflict and/or renewal" (Coombes, 2003, p1). Constitution Hill represents possibly the most ambitious and spectacular attempt yet to create a material edifice around which post-apartheid notions of community and nation can crystallize.

The process of making memorials is a significant aspect of making memory, and in making a national imaginary, in modern nation states. Yet the process is not a simple one of commemoration, of reflecting a past, but a process charged with political, social and historiological implications, particularly in a country like South Africa, where the project of nation building seeks to create alliances between people divided by language, culture and poverty. Whose memory, whose understanding of the past is to be preserved? Even more

profoundly, memorials and museums strike at the heart of their very purpose: memorialisation often implies amnesia, as I shall discuss further.

Constitution Hill is itself in many ways iconoclastic and innovative. It is my intention in this study to examine its design in the light of some of the issues raised by Vladislavić that are pertinent to national memory and the creation of a public culture in South Africa. The complex draws on many histories and voices in the construction of its museum and its extraordinary art collection. It is also my contention in this study that some aspects of its design do express hegemonic discourses, sometimes in quite troubling ways. It is important to interrogate these discourses, as we risk another "compression", in Nuttall's and Michaels' terms, and we risk the entrenchment of divides that will further alienate South Africans from one another, socially as well as economically. These discourses are often, ironically, counter to those the court intends to promote, involving assumptions of Western democracy such as equality and justice. It seems to me that in some ways the complex harks back to a sanitized, mythical, precolonial past that essentialises a popular idea of 'African-ness' and is therefore ironically racist. In this vein, I shall in Part Two discuss the emblem of the court, a stylized tree, the symbolism of which is rooted (so to speak) in a conception of the *lekgotla*.

Vladislavić's writing interrogates notions of an authentic history and totalizing identities upon which these nation building discourses rest. His fiction is useful to this project because he shows an awareness of the difficulties of attempting to produce an authentic, shared history common to all South Africans. *Propaganda by Monuments and Other Stories* dramatizes particular attempts at creating (or dismantling) memory through memorial, whether it be the statue of Strijdom in

“Propaganda by Monuments”, or a real whites only bench in the story of that name. The short stories “deal explicitly with questions of musealisation and the commodification of the past. They suggest skepticism about the capacity of monuments and memorials to convey an authentic past; they further seem to echo … warnings against the amnesiac possibilities inherent to the process of musealisation” (Warnes, 1999, p26).

1.4) Use of Terms: Post-apartheid, Post-colonial, Postmodern, Poststructuralist

‘Post’ as a prefix signifies a chronological ordering of history, but it can be used to connote far more. It is also useful to deploy this term to refer to the study of conditions — financial, cultural, social — in a country like South Africa in a certain period. It is useful to refer to the colonial and apartheid eras in this country as the period from the establishment of European colonies in the Cape in the seventeenth century, up to the country’s first democratic elections on April 27, 1994. This is the chronology I have in mind in this dissertation when I use the terms post-apartheid and post-colonial, but the implications of the terms go beyond convenient markers of historical events.

If ‘post-apartheid’ refers specifically merely to conditions since the dismantling of the grand scheme of racial segregation called apartheid, one risks, says Warnes “eliding continuities between past and future” (1999, p8). Apartheid did not just end in 1994: its legacy stretches forward into the future. This elision, the narrative that implies apartheid’s end in 1994, meant the establishment of a New South Africa, but it also meant a kind of amnesia, and an all-too-easy absolution of the sins of the old order. Warnes argues for the examination of ‘post-apartheid’ culture as a kind of post-colonial; in other words, seeing South Africa’s history as

part of Africa's, as part of a wider continental narrative of decolonization. Following Warnes, I conceive of post-apartheid South Africa as a post-colony, which has decided benefits in the context of the theory I shall then be able to use in this study. As Warnes puts it:

> Post colonial refers not only to the macro- and micrological conditions of decolonized states, but to a developing body of theoretical production that seeks to interpret these conditions and the cultural products to which they give rise (1999, p11).

Postmodernism is an even more troublesome and controversial term. Chronologically, it is difficult to pinpoint a date that marks its dawn and one risks a certain instrumentality in doing so, given that postmodernism refers more to a mood than to an era (though even over this there is controversy: theorists have been divided over whether to separate postmodernism from postmodernity [Warnes]). In this dissertation, I understand the term postmodernism to refer to a set of critical theories that have arisen over the last three or four decades (with roots in Nietzsche or Hegel) and also to cultural production that takes on the generally decentralizing aesthetics of this episteme. For the purposes of this study, I accept Rice and Waugh's definition:

> Postmodernism is a "mood" expressed theoretically across a diverse range of theoretical discourses and involving: a focus on the collapse of grand narratives into local, incommensurable language games or "little narratives"; a Foucauldian emphasis on the discontinuity and plurality of history as discursively produced and formulated; and a tendency to view the discourses of Enlightenment reason as complicit with the

> instrumental rationalization of modern life ... Postmodernism wages war on totality (2001, pp289-90).

Critical postmodernism, therefore, erodes 'rational' ideas of history and historiography as recording (or distorting) truth. History may be brute events, but it is always only available to us as imbricated in webs of discourse and representation.

Postmodernism is often used interchangeably with poststructuralism, but I see the two terms as denoting somewhat distinct categories. If postmodernism is a mood, poststructuralism is a school of thought that shares many of the markers of postmodernism, such as the decentring of the subject. That distinction made, it is more difficult to define quite who or what is poststructuralist. Many of the thinkers put into this uneasy category, such as Foucault, deny the term, not least because its most "characteristic aspect is its own refusal of a definition" (Young, 1981, pvii). However, as Young (1981) and Cahoone (1986) both say, there was a distinct philosophical movement from about the 1960s whose proponents, while by no means homogeneous, shared concerns and characteristics.

Poststructuralism is a perhaps best defined as a group of thinkers who followed and some of whom were writing against the structuralists. The latter were so called because they assumed that "meaning is made possible by the existence of underlying systems of conventions which enable elements to function individually as signs" (Young, 1981, pvii). This is problematic because it assumes a certain scientific objectivity; meaning is already in place and it is possible to verify it: an evidentiary paradigm. Poststructuralist thought, then, stems from a radical self-reflexivity, a

troubling of the idea that the intellectual him/herself can read texts objectively. This study is fundamentally underpinned by my reading of poststructuralist philosophers including Foucault and Derrida (though I have not limited myself to this school of thought). For my purposes, I see poststructuralism as useful because it decentres the subject and denies the ideas of history as a progressive teleology and of the univocal meaning of texts. This makes it possible to show that the nation is not the inevitable end of history and that the national subject is a constructed identity, allowing for a more radical critique of post-apartheid society.

1.5. Summary of Chapters.

In Part One, I engage with some of the criticism that surrounds Vladislavić's fiction. This begins with a discussion of the postmodern aspects of his writing with reference to "The Omniscope Pat. Pending" and *The Restless Supermarket*. I then discuss "The Whites Only Bench", "Courage" and "Propaganda by Monuments" in terms of how they interrogate ideas of authenticity, history and memory. In Part Two I begin with a discussion of museums, monuments and collective memory. I briefly discuss the street renaming process in Durban and the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg as examples of officially sanctioned ways of remembering the past. I then discuss Constitution Hill as a space of memory and nation building, with reference to a particular grammar of interpretation suggested by the fiction of Ivan Vladislavić.

2. PART ONE

2.1. Poststructuralist Criticism

Poststructuralist theory offers conceptual tools with which to dismantle monolithic narratives of history, historiography and nation in South Africa. I shall examine how Vladislavić, as a writer who evinces postmodernist stylistics, offers radical critiques of the South African national imaginary. Poststructuralism is associated with seemingly esoteric and difficult theory and has therefore provoked criticism, controversy and even hostility (Cahoone), but it is not my intention here to examine in any depth the debates around the term since its coining. Rather I wish to establish what poststructuralist ideas can do *vis a vis* a critique of nationalism in this country since 1994. In the following readings of Vladislavić, I hope to demonstrate why this particular mode of discourse is useful when examining his iconoclastic vision and bringing it to bear on a critique of the design and symbolism of Constitution Hill.

Though there is no doubt that Vladislavić's writing is politically satirical, it is so in a way that is, in his own words, "slightly obscure or tangential" (Warnes, 2000b, p275). The marginal positions he chooses to write from, the marginalized characters he writes and his ephemeral, sometimes surreal, style provide a critique of political regimes. Vladislavić writes from the interstices, as a white writer in post-apartheid South Africa, for instance, but also because he refuses to assume a particular standpoint. Peripheral positions are a trope of post-colonial and post-apartheid writing and are productive spaces from which to criticize centres. As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin say, peripheral subjectivities abrogate centres, but do not attempt to create

their own in response. Instead, they embrace their own liminality "as the very fabric of existence". Thus, "[D]iscourses of marginality … intersect in a view of reality which supersedes the geometric distinction of centre and margin and replaces it with a sense of the complex, interweaving and syncretic accretion of experience" (1989, p104). To understand the formation of such "geometric distinctions", I turn to the poststructuralist theory of Jacques Derrida, whose essay "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" (1978) sheds light on how Vladislavić's radical aesthetic breaks down these distinctions.

In this famous essay, Derrida articulates the standpoint of poststructuralist theory on discourse as constructed, rather than underpinned by a basic, irreducible truth. Discourses of power, he argues, are based around centres: transcendental signifiers that are the justification for the play of meaning that occurs around them and that also function to limit that play. To be able to function thus, the centre has to seem to exist outside its structure, to seem to transcend it: "[C]lassical thought concerning structure could say that the centre is, paradoxically, *within* the structure and *outside* it," says Derrida (1978, p109). Thus discourses of religion and nation, for example, are constructed. The centre is at once inside its own structure and must also appear to function without it, to lend credence to the meaning within. The centre, being outside, can be substituted for other central ideas, and the play of meaning is therefore, paradoxically, unlimited and constantly deferred. The entire Western project of modernity and Enlightenment, Derrida says, has been a search for "presence": the transcendental truth. Presence is made up of centres that can be constantly substituted, and the history of thought in the West has been a history of these chains of substitutions: "It could be shown that all the names related to fundamentals, to

principles, or to the centre have always designated an invariable presence … transcendentality, consciousness, God, man and so forth" (1978, p110).

Poststructuralist theory, therefore, has profound implications for the centripetal forces of national history and its practice. As Warnes says: "If there is no essence, or 'presence', but rather a constantly deferred play of meaning, then history becomes text, as much construction and narrative as any other form of representation, and perhaps more dangerous because not all forms of representation lay claim to the truth" (1999, p79). Or rather, our access to history, to 'brute events', becomes entirely textual. This is how monuments attempt to operate: as visual representation of some heroic legacy or the preservation of heritage, that word much beloved of South African governmental agencies. As Warnes says in reference to "Propaganda by Monuments", our access to history is "[through] the iconographic legacy of dominant ideologies, such as the bust of Lenin, or the statue of Strijdom; the artifacts of a particular period of history, such as the Whites Only bench" (1999, p79). Or indeed, the richly symbolic design of Constitution Hill.

South Africa's national narratives, even deeply conflicting ones, are built upon foundations of stories of the past (personal and national) and of national 'moments': the release of Mandela from Robben Island; the TRC; and so on. The symbols of such moments are used throughout official space: the "Simunye We Are One" leitmotif of SABC1; the street and town renaming process; the statuary displayed on Constitution Hill. Therefore, an interrogation of national myths should involve an interrogation of its national symbols. Monuments, museums and other officially constructed spaces are the interfaces between the subject/citizen and the official

national imaginary (I do not mean to imply here that citizens haplessly ingest whatever discourse is fed to them; poststructuralist theory does allow space for human agency). Vladislavić's devolving English and his radical representational strategies provide such a critique.

2.2. The Longing for Presence: "The Omniscope (Pat. Pending)"

The short story "The Omniscope (Pat. Pending)" dramatizes the arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified, between language and the material world. Surreal and frequently ironic, it is typical of Vladislavić's devolving, polyvocal englishes and his ludic aesthetic. In this story, the world of everyday objects is increasingly defamiliarised, giving rise to a subtle critique of humanist, positivist perceptions of the material. "The Omniscope Pat. Pending" also dramatizes how the representation of reality is mediated by culture and the aesthetics of the market; like a true *bricoleur*, Vladislavić has constructed this story from a jumble of lists, references and intertexts, calling up associations with pop culture and Old Masters, and citing advertising jingles and reference texts like *Roget's Thesaurus*.

The story is narrated by one Hauptfleisch who, waking from a dream, is inspired to invent the eponymous device, a box (as the name implies) for seeing everything. The Omniscope goes through several increasingly sophisticated incarnations as Hauptfleisch refines it, and the objects it contains become ever more rarefied and abstract, until at last the Omniscope contains nothing less than "brute matter" (1996, p78), the firmament itself. Though Hauptfleisch is the narrator, he is also the focus of the satire in the story. Vladislavić sets up an ironic distance between the narration and the reader, and Hauptfleisch's assumption that the box can contain everything becomes the lynchpin for a wider critique of language as offering access to materiality. This

technique anticipates the character of Aubrey Tearle in *The Restless Supermarket*, whom the reader is generally inclined at once to sympathize with, to laugh at and to censure. That Hauptfleisch is intended to be a parodic figure is signalled by his name, which, as Warnes says, can be translated as "meathead" (1999, p37).

In his dream, Hauptfleisch sees a "miner-monk" (1996, p68) peering through a narrow tube into a box of objects and making a list of what he sees inside. The list includes such items as "(6) behemoth" and "(7) mountain". The focus of the dream then shifts and Hauptfleisch becomes the "inlooker", able to see the objects himself. Trying to complete the miner-monk's list, he draws words from it, seemingly at random, and places them on a list, as if in an associative word game. Seeing a piece of "whorled silver", for instance, he comes to the conclusion that this is the eighth item on the list and that it stands for 'river', after a whimsical flight of blank verse: "fluted silver, grey dove, corded light of the river in flood, water in flight, pewter purl … " (1996, p69). On waking, he builds the prototype of the Omniscope using common household items like a shoebox and a drinking straw. The items he places inside it are intended to replicate those in the dream box, but are of course somewhat more mundane than those in the dream. "Blame the waking world" (1996, p73), he says as he places a dog biscuit, a rubber washer and a magnet disguised as a watermelon slice in the box.

I think that the Omniscope can be understood as a metaphor for the subject's access to language, and the story as critiquing the realist idea that language can represent interiority and reflect reality. As Warnes puts it, the Omniscope "functions as a spoof on the realist desire to capture totality in the language of correspondence" (1999, p35). As he develops the Omniscope,

Hauptfleisch becomes obsessed with cramming more items into it, which could represent his desire for a world in which meaning is not contingent but linked to a transcendental signifier. He has little liking for the "feeble", quotidian "waking world" (1996, p70), and the contrast he sets up between his dreams and his 'real life' seems to indicate his desire for a unitary existence. This may be partly why he feels such sympathy for Brewster, about whose kaleidoscope Hauptfleisch rhapsodizes: "To look at the beautiful forms! To lay bare the infinite possibilities generated by the narrowest principles … the symmetries of chaos" (1996, p75). The random patterns generated by a kaleidoscope are worthy because their apparently anarchic patterns are governed by the immutable laws of light and mathematics.

If the Omniscope is a metaphor for the subject's access to language, the offerings that Hauptfleisch puts into the casket can be seen as signifiers and what they represent as their signifieds. In the prototype, the two have a fairly logical relationship. The items Hauptfleisch put in the box are examples of synecdoche: 'Fire' is represented by a box of Lion matches; swords by razor blades; Hauptfleisch's dog comes to stand in for 'behemoth', although even the dog is too big to go in the box and is substituted by one of its own biscuits. But as Hauptfleisch refines the Omniscope, and becomes obsessed with cramming more and more items into it, he ceases to name the items and names only their meanings, which become increasingly stranger and more conceptual. By the time he invents Omniscope III, it contains some 100 items, including "flowers of speech … Milton's prose works… the waste periods of history …" (1996, p76).

Thus the story demonstrates the Sausseurean observation that sign and meaning are linked only arbitrarily. The increasing defamiliarisation of the items in the Omniscope serves to trouble even

the earliest offerings' claim to represent reality, because the reader is now aware that the link between the two is entirely constructed. As if to draw attention to the fact that language is a social construction and shapes the world (rather than the other way around), Omniscope I contains an item from every letter of the alphabet, from "Aberdeen Angus" to "the zigzag" except the letter X (1996, p75). Even the Omniscope itself comes adrift in a sea of signification: by the end of the story, Hauptfleisch is referring to it as "the casket, canister, caddy, caster, snuffbox, matchbox, mud box, metal box, black box, pepper box, pillbox, pick-a-box, pyx, reliquary, nest of boxes…" (1996, p78).

Hauptfleisch seems to me to foreshadow Aubrey Tearle, the cantankerous protagonist of *The Restless Supermarket*, in that he is also a stuffy, pedantic and didactic voice, obsessed with 'correct' language, and constantly turning to reference books to prove the canonical usage of words. Like Tearle, he is steeped in etymology and, like Tearle, he is well-intentioned but hampered by his prejudice, his insistence on the language of correspondence. Like Tearle, he is absolutely convinced of his own superior access to truth because of his superior — indeed, arcane — grasp of English. Vladislavić gives both Tearle and Hauptfleisch the narrative voice in their respective stories. This means that most of the parody of the character comes from the character himself, which has the effect of creating an ironic distance between the narrator and that of the reader, to humourous effect. In the case of Hauptfleisch, this distance shows up the ludicrous nature of his project — trying to cram everything into a box — thereby critiquing the idea that language can encompass everything, that language is not contingent and meaning fixed.

In his dream, Hauptfleisch strongly identifies with — in fact, becomes — the miner-monk. He sees his role as of an excavator of meaning (miner), and its guardian (monk). That he sees his invention as sacred is apparent when he insists on referring to the device as a "casket" and to the items he puts inside it as "offerings". His device is an "act of resistance" (1996, p71), but against what exactly? Warnes says that when Hauptfleisch takes exception to "the crackpot systems of belief with which the waking world is riddled" (1996, p78), he is ridiculing the idea that "language can be used as a transparent means of representing the world of things or of ideas" (Warnes, 1999, p43). He argues that the dream world represents imagination and therefore the free play of meaning. However, in my opinion, Hauptfleisch leans *towards* such a centripetal language and his dream world is the longing for transcendence that is the common thread between Vladislavić's characters, from Tearle to the four protagonists of *The Exploded View*. His problem is rather with impurity, with the multiple discourses that make up belief in everyday life.

The Omniscope is also concerned with the commodification of meaning. The Omniscope I, for instance, is sold at flea markets; it has a commercial value (R19.99, to be precise). Hauptfleisch finds this a demeaning end for his invention, as for Brewster's. Yet he is steeped in commercial discourse. The prototype Omniscope is not merely made of a shoebox: we are told that the shoes were Grasshoppers (1996, p72). Hauptfleisch identifies not only with Brewster, but with the inventors of the disposable safety razor, surely a product of modernity par excellence. The razor he sees in his dream "may actually have been a sensational Blue Super-Blade" (1996, p70). However, it is not just industrial production that is evoked, but also cultural production, and the two are seen to be linked, to represent modernity. Omniscope II contains a kind of flotsam of

Western culture, from canonical works (Milton, Ibsen, Turner, Vermeer and so on), to legal procedure ("expert evidence, expert witness") and fashion ("the peasant look in knitwear") (1996, p76). The story is riddled with clichés, which in Hauptfleisch's narrative stream of loose associations and intertexts has an ironic and defamiliarising effect. The image of a burgomaster's daughter "making lace while the sun shines" (1996, p69) seems to call up a Dutch idyll a la Vermeer, and is contrasted with the marketing speak of "action-packed adventure" (1996, p67).

The juxtaposition of this cultural detritus with advertising slogans and abstract concepts does evoke a sense of totality, as if Hauptfleisch had succeeded in his intention to get everything into a shoebox. But even this everything is thoroughly Western, the West of capitalism and globalization. As I have mentioned above, Hauptfleisch, but more especially Tearle, turns to a centralized, 'proper' English. Helgesson, following Deleuze and Guattari, refers to this as "majoritarian" and "territorialized" English, but notes that "the impact of English in South Africa has had as much to do with American global capital as with anything emanating from the British Isles … This, too, makes English major, but with a new twist" (2004, pp779-780). Vladislavić's rich mixture of voices — the "multiple levels of English, from 'oneiric' and 'archaic' language to street-talk and ad-jargon" (2004, p780) — provides another layer of critique of realist ideas of language.

Hauptfleisch, despite the grandiosity with which he views his own invention, ultimately chooses anonymity. "Let me be almost an anonym, gone and just about forgotten, like Brewster, my champion, my charger", he says (1996, p78). In this, again, he is like Aubrey Tearle, who measures professional excellence in the complete effacement of the proofreader's existence.

“[T]here has never been a *famous* proofreader” (2001, p111), he says. Both claim a kind of superior access to language, and both seek a transcendental position from which to order meaning as representative of reality. Both fail in tragicomic ways. The irony of Hauptfleisch’s reaction to the dogma he perceives in the world around him is that, in trying to embrace all, he himself succumbs to dogma.

2.3. Space and Subjectivity: *The Restless Supermarket*:

With regard to the “Omniscope Pat. Pending”, I discussed how Vladislavić’s minoritised, deterritorialised English interrogated realist norms of representation, language and reality. *The Restless Supermarket*, his ingenious second novel, welds these concerns to a preoccupation with the spatial characteristics of the post-apartheid city. Tearle’s constant and playful (though pedantic) use of homonyms, anagrams, puns and so on brings ludic elements to the novel, and certain textual strategies foreground the act of reading itself. Thus the idea of representative language is constantly called into question.

Tearle subscribes to this centripetal idea of language, which becomes for him an ordering structure, used to impose his conservative views on the world. His anxiety at the changing face of Johannesburg in transition, a process he cannot control, is expressed through the fictional city of Alibia, which becomes a metaphor for the links between post-apartheid space and post-apartheid subjectivity. Tearle’s anxiety at confronting the material is also expressed through the novel’s trope of death. *The Restless Supermarket* offers ways of understanding how memory and identity are mapped on to place in the post-apartheid city.

The Restless Supermarket is set in 1992 and narrated by Tearle, who has lived in Hillbrow for years and notes with dismay the influx of black people and poorer immigrants into the suburb as the spatial confines of apartheid are relaxed. Tearle is a proofreader by calling, though retired from the profession, and asserts that the "decline in standards" (2001, p323) he sees all around him is directly linked to the amazing increase in corrigenda — errors — in newspapers and public space. He asserts that the world is in a kind of amoral "general malaise" that has steadily worsened since the 1960s, "when the permissive attitude to life first gained ground" (2001, p81). Tearle is obsessed with collecting these corrigenda and, for a while, with "public-service proofreading" (2001, p175), or accosting the proprietors of shops whose names annoy him. For instance, the name of the eponymous supermarket is supposed to signify that it never closes, but as Tearle complains to its bemused proprietor, the "restless" in its name implies "willful chaos" (2001, p84).

Tearle's preoccupation with 'standards', with correct manners and the genteel mores that he sees as the hallmarks of European culture, are for him embodied by 'proper' English. He compiles these corrigenda into a fable he calls "The Proofreader's Derby" (2001, pp183-228), the corrected text of which forms the second of the novel's three chapters, and for which, typically, he harbours grand ambitions: to present it as a kind of proofreading competition, presided over by himself of course. "The Proofreader's Derby" is an account of how the fictional city of Alibia starts literally to come apart at the seams, destroyed and destabilized by the errors that have crept in to the phonebook, maps and similar records. In Tearle's wistful imagination, text and space find a direct link that is revealing of Vladislavić's concerns with space and identity. Through Tearle, Vladislavić conceives of the city as text, as constructed space through which meaning can

be inscribed and which inscribes meaning upon the subjectivities of the people who live in it and move through it.

However, it is not just space that is text in the novel, but people too. This is apparent in Tearle's attitude towards those around him, which is again to proofread them. Though he likes to regard his quixotic crusade against corrigenda as a public service, it does not stem from any altruistic urge. He is, if not entirely misanthropic, certainly supercilious in his dealings with those around him, even his friends at the Café Europa. His aim is to better society, but not in the image of an inclusive, democratic Johannesburg: he simply wants to keep "the wrong crowd" (2001, p155; p195) out of Hillbrow and in their 'proper' place. Seeking to proofread space, he seeks also to improve the people around him, an impulse that is not the measure of any concern for them, but rather, as his friend Spilkin tells him, "the measure of [his] disdain" (2001, p259). Thus he constantly deplores their dress, their manners (or rather, lack thereof) and their grammar. On his first forays into the Café Europa, Tearle meets Spilkin, Merle and Mevrou Bonsma (the Café's pianist), white middle-class retirees like himself. But as the old crowd drifts apart and the character of Hillbrow changes, new patrons join Tearle at the Café, a young crowd, apparently mostly black and coloured, who seem to him uncouth and wild. He conceives of them in terms of their corporeality, reading their inferiority in the colour of their skin or other physical features. Their bodies become text to him. In a grotesque description of Wessels's ears, he concludes, "It made sense to me that Wessels should have these meaty handles attached to his head. Auditory meatus. To coin a false etymology" (2001, p11). One of the crowd he refers to as the "improvable girl" (2001, p281). Similarly, in a rather more tender moment, Tearle has his "Proofreader's Derby" hero and alter ego Fluxman conceive of a lover as if she were a book:

"He reached for a page of her mind … Then his eyes and hands moved over her surface proofing the metrical skeleton concealed in her warming limbs … composing every square word of her into a perfectly ordered meaning, into a sentence that meant exactly what it said" (2001, p220).

Tearle's attitude to society, then, is to correct and order it in terms of a standard that looks to a (partly imaginary) metropolitan Europe. However, as Mike Marais (2002) points out, this attitude is profoundly ironic. While Tearle, like Hauptfleisch, conceives of language as unproblematically representative, and moreover as being correct or not, Marais notes that he implicitly acts with the understanding that space, identity and language are linked: he seeks to effect change (however impotently) through imagining a reorientation of city space in "The Proofreader's Derby" (2001, p102). Tearle believes that proper English and proper behaviour are linked: the irony is that he therefore understands implicitly that language is an ordering force in the world. Subconsciously, to him, language and the material are inextricable, and do construct one another. As Marais puts it, the irony in Tearle's desire to return order to Alibia is "in itself an indication that the natural order is neither natural nor eternal" (2001, p102).

It is telling that Tearle is not a literary man. He has little professional contact with literature: the highlight of his career was proofreading the telephone book. When he discovers that Merle has compared him to Edward Casaubon (2001, p268), he has to look up the reference; he has never read *Middlemarch*. His métier is not the literary canon but reference texts. He carries a dictionary everywhere he goes (it even saves his life, in a tongue-in-cheek twist at the end of the novel, like a pocket Bible saving a soldier from a bullet). Tearle is steeped in the mechanics of language, in spelling, punctuation, grammar, the more arcane the better. His concerns are not with art, but

with the structure that underpins, not just language, but to him the entire social structure. The discursive and geographical centre that justifies this structure emanates from his idea of Europe. Tearle has never been to Europe and has a certain amount of disdain for the Europeans he does meet (mostly Eastern European immigrants). His love for the Café Europa and his reaction to the importation of simulacral American lifestyle in the form of 'atmosphere' are based on his own simulacrum, signified by his use of "ambience" (2001, p289) and his love for the painted, composite city of Alibia, where "a Slav would feel just as much at home … as a Dutchman" (2001, pp17-18, p19). His first impressions of the Café are revealing of his affinity for tourist guide Europe: the French doors, Corinthian columns and the "postcard of bright blue sky against which the top of the Hillbrow Tower stuck up like an attachment for a vacuum cleaner … I thought it made a touching contrast to the cast-iron Tours d'Eiffel in the balcony railing" (2001, p17).

Tearle contrasts this genteel "ambience" with the uncouth new crowd at the Café. His longing for a centralized, metropolitan ideal is a longing for colonialism, for colonial discourse to shape the city. As Graham points out, it is "the Africanisation of the city that causes him the keenest anxiety … [it is the] multiplicity and mobility of the new city dwellers that Tearle would like to segregate and fix in place" (2001, p86). He identifies with colonizers, referring to the first Europeans in South Africa as "we". That "we" is unequivocal, fixed: "What do I mean by we? Don't make me laugh," he says (2001, p6). Tearle's anxiety about the changing spatial relations of Johannesburg, then, is seen to be linked to an understanding of the city as text, as something constructed by social relations and therefore language, written upon and of course in need of correction.

If *The Restless Supermarket* can be read as revealing ways in which space and its uses changed in transition, it is in “The Proofreader’s Derby” that these concerns are most explicitly worked through. The “Derby” dramatizes not only these concerns with space, but also Tearle’s profound anxiety at the way it is changing around him. The fable is set in Alibia, which bears more than a passing resemblance to Johannesburg, but where proofreaders and their ilk wield the kind of power Tearle can only dream of. Fluxman[2], chief among the guardians of standards in Alibia (who include a librarian and a cartographer), can literally shape the city by correcting the errors that have crept into the phonebook, his particular provenance. Fluxman and his cohorts notice that standards have started to decline rapidly in Alibia’s records, and concomitantly in the city itself. They set about preventing the city from drifting away from its moorings, preserving the fragile veneer of order on the elemental chaos that threatens civilization. Some of the passages in “The Proofreader’s Derby” quite clearly indicate the extent to which the story is really about Tearle’s dismay at the changing fabric of Johannesburg, most of all when the black shanty town is moved next to an upmarket street:

> Most of the avenue dandies had run away at the first opportunity. But a gang of young bucks from the musical theatres were using their canes to drive the swarthy settlers back into the shanties. As fast as they were routed, others took their place. Then a whole tribe in luminous bubus came spilling out in a rush, men, women and children, reeking of woodsmoke and unthinkable foodstuffs (2001, p212).

[2] Nomenclature is often significant in Vladislavic’s work. Hauptflesich is but one example, as is Nieuwehuizen of *The Folly*, who is indeed trying to build a new house. Marais argues that the strange names of the characters in *The Restless Supermarket* may destabilize the text (2002, p110). Fluxman seems to refer to Tearle’s fear of change.

The “Derby” is to an extent wish fulfillment for Tearle. Fluxman’s own success and dashing appearance (he has a full head of hair, unlike Tearle) rather underline Tearle’s own impotence. He has his revenge on the Restless Supermarket, which in the “Derby” becomes emblematic of a profound social unease. His fictionalized supermarket is one of the last outposts of chaos in a newly reordered Alibia. When Fluxman and his cohorts arrive there, the items for sale have begun to drift into one another, their materiality undermined and subsumed into disorder:

> The interior of The Restless Supermarket was barely recognizable. The entire space was seething, alive with an indiscriminate, indefatigable jumble of tins, jars, bottles, packets, boxes, bags, all mingled into one substance, whose textures eluded them, being simultaneously soft and hard, fuzzy and sharp, perishable and indestructible (2001, pp221-222).

Reading the city thus, as one large disjointed text, “suggests a close connection between spatial relations and narrative”, says Graham (2007, p88). Thus the “Derby” is a subtle vehicle for Vladislavić’s concerns with how memory and identity are mapped on to the post-apartheid city.

That he chooses a marginal, even anachronistic, figure like Tearle as the focus for this exploration makes it all the more powerful. Tearle is not affiliated to any political movement and shows very little interest in political realities, though he is certainly aware of current events and the headline speech of the day seeps into his thoughts. At one point he complains that when playing a word game with Merle, “All that would come into my mind was Boycott! Boycott! Boycott! The newspapers were full of it” (2001, p89). However, he has had an unusually privileged perspective on a particular narrative of transition in Johannesburg, inscribed in the

phonebook. Proofreading the phonebook has given Tearle an insight into how the demographics of the city changed in the early 1990s, as he was able to track the movement of populations from certain areas to others. He is of course particularly interested in the transforming racial profile of Hillbrow. Once radically divided into white and black, the city has begun to 'grey'. Tearle can observe this change through surnames, which, he says, "conceal age, status and sex, and reveal race" (2001, p128). Tearle seeks to understand change through a kind of system of mapping, but he fails to consider its wider causes and deplores it for its own sake. As Graham puts it, "he fails to make it explicit that the migrations he observes are a direct result of the malign engineering of the apartheid state, and of the subsequent collapse of its spatial schemas" (2001, p80).

In his perusal of the phonebook, Tearle is dismayed to find that a family called Merope has moved into flats near his in white Hillbrow. Merle tells him they're probably Greek rather than African (2001, p129), a sly reminder on Vladislavic's part that demographics, like statistics, are forms of knowledge that lay claim to superior truths but are actually as open to contradiction and as contingent as any other. To have black people moving in to Hillbrow is troubling to Tearle, who, though he evinces no great love of the suburb and finds the Hillbrow tower "vulgar" (2001, p90), nevertheless invests the space of the area with his consciousness. Though Tearle's relationship with Johannesburg is troubled, his identity is inextricable from it, mapped on to its contours. He envisions himself as a kind of Johannesburg Cockney, born within sight of the Hillbrow Tower, though it was built years after his birth (2001, p20). His sympathy with Alibia, his idealized, segregated Johannesburg, is underscored by the peculiar satisfaction he gets from matching the "excrescences" (2001, p22) on his bald pate with the topography of the painted Alibia in the mural on the wall of the Café Europa. He expresses his anxiety about the transition

from apartheid in spatial terms. After the new crowd at the Café Europa vandalise the model Johannesburg at Miniland, crudely using the Hillbrow tower as a phallic object, Tearle envisions the sacking of Johannesburg by this new element:

> The city belonged to these Goliaths now, the country belonged to them. I saw them stretched out on the runways at Jan Smuts, with their heads propped on the terminal buildings, taking a smoke break, going slow. Flagpoles and street lights were no more than toothpicks in their fists, which they were always raising. I saw them marching down the Big Hole of Kimberley, with the cables of the bucket winches tangled about their ankles, crunching underfoot the little miners who had flocked to build the new South Africa. I saw them striding up the Union Buildings, two terraces at a time, in their big running shoes with the tongues hanging out (2001, p121).

It is plain that, like most of Vladislavić's work, *The Restless Supermarket* has satirical intent. One of the novel's most remarkable and entertaining traits is its ludic sensibility. Tearle is the target of much of the satire in the novel, but he is also its originator. He is not of course supposed to be a sympathetic character, and the reader is inspired to laugh at his curmudgeonly ways. However, the reader also laughs with Tearle, as he negotiates a landscape of malapropisms, misusages, odd or misheard pop culture references (Felonious Monk (2001, p38)) and strange commercial nomenclature (Mr. Fatso. Mnr Vetsak (2001, p50)) and presents them as ludicrous. Satire, as Rob Gaylard notes, "is a politically pointed form of humour, often including pastiche and parody" (2005, p130). There is most certainly a political intent to the satire in this novel, but Vladislavić, with typical evanescence, does not take aim at any particular regime or political

party. The satire in *The Restless Supermarket* is aimed at the totalizing claims to truth possessed by such regimes — whether nationalist, colonial or revolutionary — represented by Tearle's ordering gesture, and at the way in which capitalism is transforming the space of the post-apartheid city. Indeed, this is seen as being a much more profound change, enhanced by the influx of black people into Hillbrow.

Vladislavić, through certain textual strategies, calls attention to the textuality of the novel, making the reader conscious of his/her status as a reader. There are, for instance, puns that only work visually, that in Tearle's words are "lost on the flapping ear" (2001, p8). In one case, he writes Moses as Moçes: "I'd added the hammer and sickle because he was from Moçambique" (2001, p7); in another, he reflects, on seeing the drawing of a bird next to a misspelled inscription ("Peace & luv"), "The duv of peace, the pidgin" (2001, p21). There are intentional corrigenda planted in the text (Tearle's mishearing of gender benders as gender-blenders [2001, p176] is one instance). Both Graham and Marais note that the inclusion of the corrected text of "The Proofreader's Derby" consciously involves the reader, who must trace the corrigenda now effaced. Marais argues that such strategies create a level of irony in the novel, a collapsing of the distance between the novel and the reader. The reader is asked to become a proofreader, which "allies the reader *in* the text with the reader *of* the text" (2002, p109). This has the effect of historicizing the reader, of showing him/her to be as imbricated in his/her context as Tearle is in his; the act of reading "is also informed by a set of codes that aren't stable and absolute but deeply provisional and discursively constructed" (2002, p109) . The fact of ordering the world through discourse is thus shown to be an intrinsic part of how we make sense of the world. That the ordering of the city is so important to Tearle's conception of himself and the expression of

his anxieties reveals Vladislavić's awareness of how space and self are inextricable. Thus, through Tearle, Vladislavić examines the complex nuances of post-apartheid subjectivity.

One of the novel's strangest and most humourous moments is the scene where Tearle and Spilkin are painted black by the drunken attendees of the Goodbye Bash. This scene also offers the opportunity to discuss the carnivalesque aspect of *The Restless Supermarket*. The carnivalesque in Bakhtin's terms is the humour of inversion: the low humour of the grotesque, parody and satire as exemplified for Bakhtin in the carnival, as depicted in Renaissance literature. As he says in his introduction to *Rabelais and his World*, carnival laughter is at once derisive and productive, it is "degrading" and "uncrowning", but it is also simultaneously "regenerating" (1984, p23). The carnivalesque, however, can be thought of as transcending its historical context; carnivalised writing can be any writing that is concerned with abolishing hierarchies in moments of laughter or play. Carnivalised satire is productive, says Gaylard, because it avoids the trap of much satire: to appear to rant (2005). For him, Vladislavić is one of the most successful satirists writing in South Africa today because his satire is balanced between "systematicity and play" (2005, p131). In this particular passage of *The Restless Supermarket* Tearle is degraded, brought down from his superior vantage, by the act of being painted. He has lost his glasses in the fray and the defamiliarised state he finds himself in suspends the hierarchies he normally imagines form his world. His confusion of tears and laughter, paint and blood, is nothing if not carnivalesque:

> My breath came back … The black gave way to grey, shot through with red. Blood in my eyes … I felt around on the floor for my spectacles. A fuzzy teddy bear appeared out of

> the mist, weeping hysterically, and put them in my hand … I got to my feet. An odd little man stood before me, a black man, some faithful old servant perhaps, who had witnessed the massacre. He was … weeping inconsolably … he had something wrong with his skin. It was as thick as paste. Scar tissue. Wattles of mortified flesh at the neck. Had he been burnt? … It was Spilkin. And in the glare of that recognition, I saw something else: he wasn't weeping at all. He was laughing (2001, pp271-2).

The act of being painted neutralizes the one signifier Tearle has assumed gives him superiority over the uncouth new crowd: his white skin. This is profoundly disturbing to Tearle who, after this moment of inversion, now that the hierarchies have been dissolved, finds there is nothing left holding his world together. In a kind of catharsis, he "disgorge[s] this superabundance of error" (2001, p273), all the corrigenda and neologisms that have plagued his consciousness, the "gaudy Gouda, the Infamous Grouse, the Jiffywrap, the Oatso Easy … Vincent van Gogh … John Paul Getty III … Dumbo … innumerable teacups and coffee mugs" (2001, p273). As he loses the certainties of his ordering gesture, he performs the instability of his own subjectivity, feeling his grip on the text of his being slip: "I was not in the habit of speaking in this fashion, of seeing, of saying disorder, of chaos, of coarseness, but I had lost my tone. Where were my cadences, my measures? My pages were out of order" (2001, p273).

It is telling that Tearle thinks the "black man" in the above passage has been burnt. This harks back to an earlier passage when Tearle describes seeing a body in a field near his flat, which he thinks is black but later finds out was a white man's charred remains. The body is thrown up from the "reef of disorder" (2001, p7) that underlies Johannesburg in Tearle's imagination,

evidence that his ordering gesture is fundamentally tied up with the space of the city. Marais reads the image of the Restless Supermarket and the trope of death as the same image, “an integral part of Vladislavić’s ironic presentation of Tearle’s ordering gesture, since they are a constant reminder of the limits of Tearle’s world” (2002, p107). Confronted by the materiality of the body, Tearle is at a loss. The body in death is, in Bakhtin’s formulation, grotesque, and therefore degrading. “Not only parody in its narrow sense but all the other forms of grotesque realism, bring down to earth, turn their subjects into flesh,” he says (1984, p20). Thus the body is an equalizer, and its materiality disrupts Tearle’s ordering gesture. Confronting the mortality and materiality of humanity tends to destabilize the sense of superiority he has at other times. This is most clearly seen in the passage where Tearle, Merle and some other habituees of the Café go on an outing to the Johannesburg Zoo, where a man is presented as a specimen in a cage marked *Homo sapiens*. Tearle’s use of “we” to indicate “civilised”, colonial Europeans, which previously was so unequivocal, becomes troubled: “We were on the verge of extinction, I realized … But what did I really mean? Who were ‘we’? The human race? People of good sense and common decency? The ragtag remnants of the Café Europa? Was it a royal ‘we’?” (2001, p154). Tearle is then in his own estimation the last proponent of that “we”, in a world of transition, ironically the aberration rather than the norm, though his ordering gesture is premised on imposing its normativity. As Marais says, “The ultimate irony in the novel’s depiction of Tearle’s being-in-the-world, then, is that even as he is shown to be in-the-world, a world which has shaped him, that world is shown to be in transition” (2002, p106).

2.4 Authenticity and Amnesia: "The Whites Only Bench"

In this story, Vladislavić seems to agree with Gary Baines, who urges historians to interrogate heritage projects that "construct simplistic, sanitized versions of the past that amount to mythicisation … [and] seek to validate or confer legitimacy on politically correct versions of the past." To which he adds: "And we should critique official versions of the past and deconstruct the narratives that reify this sort of history" (2003, p3). "The Whites Only Bench" constitutes a subtle, multi-layered critique of historiography, museumisation and the national imaginary in post-apartheid South Africa, based on the idea that history is not what happened in the past, but rather how those events are represented and used in the present. Like Baines, Vladislavić seems to suggest that we should be suspicious of totalizing narratives of history as espoused by elites, because what is remembered usually functions to serve the interests of those in power.

History, then, is narrative and as such is crucial to national identity, says Baines (2003, p3), particularly in such a diverse and divided society as South Africa's. To induce such a highly disparate population to accept that they somehow share a common origin and destiny because they happen to live within the same borders, elites must undertake to disseminate certain ways of remembering. Baines contends that South Africans are consumers, choosing their histories from a selection made available by heritage bodies and the mass media, which all to an extent espouse the competing discourses of what might be called Rainbow Nation ideology and Africanism. "For it is popular history produced by mass culture rather than academic history that determines how the past is remembered by society at large," he adds (2003, p2). In Vladislavić's story, through the eponymous bench, he reveals an awareness of the politically and socially constructed nature of history. The bench is emblematic of the story's central tensions, of what appear at first

to be dichotomies of artifice and authenticity, of truth and untruth, but actually function to break down such divisions entirely and replace them with a sense of reality as subjective and contingent. Vladislavić also demonstrates an awareness of history as subject to the demands of consumer capitalism, as his satire of what might be called the 'packaging' of apartheid shows.

It is fitting that the title of the story is ambiguous; it refers to a bench in the singular, yet there are two benches in the story, and it is not clear to which one the title refers. Is the real Whites Only bench the one that was designated a separate amenity by law during apartheid but that has become devoid of meaning as a symbol of injustice? Or is the real bench the item manufactured in a post-apartheid workshop, which is variously referred to as a "copy" (1996, p65), a "replica" (p59), "the fake" (p64), but is actually capable still of causing controversy? This is the central tension in the story around which the other issues of representation of the past are based. The replica bench is the creation of Charmaine, the assistant curator of a new museum documenting apartheid. Room 27 of the museum has been set aside for the exhibit on so-called 'petty apartheid' — the regime's control over the quotidian movements of Blacks, as embodied by The Separate Amenities Act of 1953. The museum is weeks away from opening and Charmaine and the unnamed narrator (who is not granted a sex, age or any other identifying feature) are frantically at work getting Room 27 ready for its exhibit, of which the bench is to form a part. However, Strickland, the museum's new director, is horrified at the idea of exhibiting a fake and demands that the genuine article be found. "This is a museum, not a high school operetta. It is our historical duty to be authentic," she tells Charmaine (1996, p56). A new bench is advertised for and bought from the Municipal Bus Drivers Association (MBDA) and placed on the exhibit instead, but Charmaine salvages hers, and places it in the museum's garden (under the slyly

named *kaffirboom*), where it causes more controversy than its ‘genuine’ counterpart, as the setting of a highly ambiguous press photograph of Coretta Scott King, and as an object still resonant of deep divisions.

Strickland’s comparison of a museum with a high school operetta is illustrative of the binary in this story between artifice and authenticity, and typical of a centripetal urge towards notions of truth and purity. She echoes her own remark later in the story, at the museum’s Steering Committee meeting. In reference to the bench again, she says: “This is a museum, not an amusement arcade” (1996, p59). Here again she is drawing on classical assumptions about museums: that they are about educating rather than merely amusing. Her demand for authenticity aligns her, as Warnes puts it, with “a kind of historiography that assumes that the project of the historian is to uncover or discover narratives of the past” (1996, p95). By comparing the bench to a prop in a second-rate stage show, not only is Strickland implying that, as a fake, it has an inferior claim to stand for the apartheid injustice, she is also associating it with ‘low’ art, as opposed to ‘high’ art, which is classically associated with truth. If truth is beauty and beauty truth, then the bench cannot be beautiful. And yet it is, as the narrator describes it:

> It was a beautiful bench – as a useful object, I mean, rather than a symbol of injustice. The wooden slats were tomato sauce red. The arms and legs were made of iron, but cleverly moulded to resemble branches, and painted brown to enhance a rustic illusion. The bench looked well used, which is often a sign that a thing has been loved. But when you looked closer … you saw that all these signs of wear and tear were no more than

> skin-deep. Charmaine had applied all of them in the workshop … Charmaine had even smeared the city's grimy shadows into the grain (1996, p55).

The bench has many layers of fakery, from its "rustic" aspect to its "skin-deep" wear from the backsides of whites over many decades. To me this suggests that Vladislavić does not intend to grant authenticity to the 'fake' bench, even though it seems more powerfully symbolic than the real one. Rather his intentions here are to render the classical division between 'authentic' and 'fake' entirely obsolete, by suggesting that any representative object is a product of narrative rather then transcendental truth. Elaine Young argues that Charmaine's bench is a simulacrum, "a fiction based on a fiction: the 'real' bench was only a Whites Only bench for as long as its legitimizing ideology lasted, after which *nothing* dependent upon apartheid hegemony could purport to be 'authentic'" (2001, p371). The bench mediates; it narrativises history and comes to stand for an idea. To Charmaine, certainly, it is real as a symbol of injustice. For her, recreating the bench represents a "tactical retrieval of the past" (2001, p371), or, as Warnes says, "Charmaine's point … is that the museum's task is the preservation of meaning rather than the preservation of specific artifacts, and that a substitution made between signifiers does not necessarily result in a loss of meaning" (1999, 96-7). This is evident in the research she puts into the bench – it is a kind of composite of other benches from photos and other sources.

The museum staff have created a chronological narrative of apartheid, and with each careful authentic detail, it becomes more mediated, more representative. This passage, following Strickland's "little drama" (1996, p55) with Charmaine, is revealing: "I must say that it made me feel bad, when I thought about all the effort Charmaine and I had put into everything from the

Sharpeville massacre to the Soweto Uprising, trying to get the details right, every abandoned shoe, every spent cartridge, every bloodied stitch of clothing … ” (1996, p56). Vladislavić's fictional museum anticipates the Apartheid Museum, which opened in 2001 in Johannesburg, and demonstrates just such a carefully managed chronology of apartheid history. Visitors to the Apartheid Museum are channelled along a specific direction, watching and reading multimedia exhibits that document a teleological narrative of history, and a triumphalist notion of liberation. After a walk through the dark halls, the visitor emerges into brighter spaces, where images of Nelson Mandela's release and South Africa winning the Rugby World Cup in 1995 — nation building in technicolour — play on TV screens. I shall discuss this museum further in Part Two of this dissertation.

The idea of the past as narrative is evinced by the treatment as historical artifact not only of the bench, but also of press photography. There are four sets of photos in the story, and all are press photos. The first mentioned is taken by a photographer for the *Star*, who captures the image of Coretta King on the bench on her visit to the museum; the same paper runs a photo essay about museum staff member Pincus on his errand to fetch Strickland's 'real' bench from the MBDA; and there are two photographs depicting apartheid unrest: the iconic photograph of the dying Hector Petersen, one of the schoolchildren shot by police on June 16, 1976, during the Soweto Uprising, and, less notably, a photo on a calendar depicting a 'typical' riot scene (children with stones in their hands, riot policemen with rifles, between the lines a misplaced reporter with a camera") (1996, p55). I have not the space to offer a close examination of each photograph in this study, and Graham Warnes has already done so in his own dissertation; rather, I intend to

focus on the implications photography as a medium of representation has for the story's concerns.

Photography is a medium of representation that like any other uses its own system of signifiers to convey meaning to the viewer/reader. Fictional representation, like classical novels, is artificial, not because it represents what is not 'true', but rather because it employs such devices as make its representational devices seem natural. Roland Barthes demonstrated this with what he calls codes. One of these codes, the chronological code, is a shared Western literary tradition of narrative that makes novelistic chronology seem authentic and natural, though it is mediated and cultural. As Barthes puts it, "'dating', which seems natural and objective to us today, is in fact a highly cultural practice — which is to be expected since it implies a certain ideology of time … (a historical way of cutting up time for purposes of dramatization, of scientific appearance, of reality-effect)" (1973, p191). Barthes also demonstrated that novels function intertextually; that is, their meaning is contingent, not merely on authorial intention (though this is certainly one dimension of meaning in novelistic discourse), but also through what the reader brings to their reading, the texts s/he has read before. As he explains, "What founds the text is not an internal, closed, accountable structure, but the outlet of the text on to other texts, other signs …" (1973, p174).

Barthes's theories are also applicable to photographs as narrative texts. Few media lay claim to such untroubled access to 'real life' as press photographs do, yet they are as constructed and as socially contingent as are novels. And like a novel, what the viewer brings to the photograph is as important as what the photographer intended to shoot. Vladislavić demonstrates this with

each of his photos. Firstly, the photo of Hector Petersen is the only non-fictional photo in the story; that is, the only photograph that Vladislavić does not invent. This of course has the effect of again troubling that binary of authenticity versus artifice. It is highly likely that the reader of "The Whites Only Bench" is familiar with this image, as it is arguably one of the most famous photographs ever taken and is certainly iconic of the apartheid struggle. To include it alongside three other entirely imaginary photographs is provocative. It is entirely possible that Mrs King could have visited South Africa and toured its museums; Vladislavić's use of a 'real' person in a fictional representation adds yet another level of irony to the photograph of her that appears in the *Star*. The Hector Petersen photograph is not invested with the same level of irony, but is poignant, rather. The narrator still finds that the stricken or traumatized hands of the photo's subjects are eloquent: "These hands are still moving, they still speak to me," he says (1996, pp60-61). The photo of Mrs. King is also evocative, however; using both, Vladislavić is almost self-referential. He makes it clear that he is engaged in the same process of representation as the curators of the museum in the story, thus positioning the reader as a reader much as Tearle's missed corrigenda did in *The Restless Supermarket*.

Strickland embodies the common sense view of history, and it is suggested that this is not the first time the curatorial team have had to deal with that attitude, as the former director "left in a huff after the fiasco with the wooden AK47s" (1996, p57). This may be why Reddy has a "routine" (1996, p60) designed to demonstrate why the museum does not advertise for display items. On advertising for a possible witness to the Hector Petersen shooting, the museum was flooded with submissions of the bullet that killed him, all anachronistic and inappropriate for police use. Reddy tells Strickland, pointing at the lunchbox of bullets, "this is the bullet that

killed Hector Petersen" (1996, p63). This is a pivotal sentence in the story, and encapsulates its concerns. Reddy intends to indicate to Strickland that popular stories and common sense ideas of the past are not necessarily historically accurate, and moreover that historical accuracy is chimerical. His confusing superfluity of detail about the day shows that it is not the amount of information available; it is not a question of having enough access to the 'truth'. Facts will always be subject to interpretation and representation. His routine also serves to demonstrate that the function of a museum is not to unearth this objective truth, but rather to encode meaning in a way that takes into account the possibilities of forgetting the past. The poignancy with which Vladislavić invests the Hector Petersen photograph demonstrates that because the past is representation does not mean we cannot engage with it. "The Whites Only Bench" is a warning against amnesia, and suggests that the commodification of history and its representation by the nation building school of thought has the capacity to effect forgetfulness.

The photograph of Hector Petersen contrasts oddly with the photograph that illustrates the calendar on the wall of the workshop. It too is a photograph of an anti-apartheid riot involving children, but the effect is of obsolescence, underlined by the narrator's comment, "Did [Strickland] realize that the calendar was ten years old?" (1996, p55). The calendar is a commodity; the photograph is serving a decorative function and lacks the resonance of the Sam Nzima photograph. It points to how the process of commodification can strip an artifact of its original sets of meanings and refigure it in another set of signs, subject to the market.

The items for sale in the museum gift shop are also examples of the packaging of apartheid history. The shop stocks items including "soapstone hippopotami with sly expressions, coffee-

table catalogues, little wire bicycles and riot control vehicles, garish place mats and beaded fly whisks" (1996, p51). The hippo and the museum guest book, which is covered with zebra skin wrapping paper, and the beaded flywhisk seem to suggest a South Africa being repackaged for the global market, in terms of what makes it exotic: its wildlife and indigenous cultures. Juxtaposed with these items and a catalogue, the riot vehicle becomes just another sign of that exoticism to be marketed to tourists, rather than a symbol of a traumatic past. The fact that there is a series of mugs with pictures of leaders past and present means that someone has probably manufactured a range of mugs bearing the faces of Mandela next to those of, say, Verwoerd. I do not mean to imply that the photographs originally were possessed of some pure meaning that the act of buying and selling has somehow sullied; rather that their recontextualisation has subjected what was once terrible to an anaesthetized amnesia. Vladislavić's ultimate intention in this story seems to be a warning that the discourse of nation building too easily elides the difficulties and violence of the past, and that the repackaging of history can all too easily make us forgetful.

As Graham has noted, museumising apartheid can have the effect of making the past seem no longer relevant: "Post-apartheid South Africa's attempts to render particular versions of historical memory in virtually living form risk succumbing to [the] ironic amnesia of musealisation" (2007, p72). Certainly the bench in Room 27 seems to have succumbed; it is literally an "old museum piece" (1996, p65), but the narrator also means this in the pejorative sense, as of something forgotten and irrelevant. The bench in the garden has "the edge" over the museum piece: it is still imbued with the power to divide. The story ends with one last juxtaposition: the reactions to the bench in the garden of a white man ("a history teacher say") and a black woman (1996, p65), who as Warnes says, can be viewed as polar opposites in terms

of the privilege accorded them by apartheid discourse. The fact that these binaries persist, he says, suggests that "power differentials are less amenable to closure or eradication than was the system designed to enforce them" (1999, p72).

The final passage of the story is deceptive because it is humourous — the teacher's pink ankles and relaxed demeanour and the black woman's resentment and the fact that she takes the bench seriously are funny. But the imagery is violent: the blossoms are associated with flames and explosives. This seems to me to be a warning against forgetting: the black woman's feet are still "aching" (1996, p66); she is still burdened by history, the history that is rooted in violence. The *kaffirboom* tree spreads its leaves over the scene: the present is in the shadow of colonialism. Ironic amnesia, Vladislavić seems to suggest, is more violence to an already violated society.

2.5. History and Representation: "Courage" and "Propaganda by Monuments"

"Courage" is narrated by a young boy (and later young man) who lives in the seaside village of Lufafa. The context is that of the end of apartheid rule, and the story begins with the arrival of a white man in the village, an artist called Meyerold Becker who is seeking a model for a sculpture. His commission is from the brand new ANC government, which wants to erect a memorial to the people who fought for liberation during apartheid. The statue, Becker tells the villagers, is not to be straightforwardly representational, but will represent "an idea — the idea of courage" (1996, p122). The statue is to stand outside the government buildings in nearby Fort Alexander. The men of the village are not necessarily united in their enthusiasm to pose for

Becker, but there is almost universal dismay when the artist picks the most abject subject possible: the village drunkard Kumbuza.

Through the figure of Becker, Vladislavić explores the dynamics of power between the metropolitan centre and the rural periphery in South Africa. Although Becker's whiteness is foregrounded in the consciousness of the alternately repulsed and admiring narrator (who has never met a white person before), Becker ultimately does not represent white interests. This undermines the simple binary between black and white that dominates both apartheid and post-apartheid thinking, and provides a much more nuanced account of relations of power in the new South Africa. As in "The Whites Only Bench", Vladislavic questions the ability of monuments to represent 'authentic' narratives of the past, and makes similar warnings of the amnesia inherent in commemoration. Through the figure of Kumbuza, he offers a certain validation of history as the subnarratives of ordinary people. Through this character's redemptive assumption of the role granted him by the artist Becker, Vladislavić seems to assert that these subnarratives can suggest a way forward that national myths and metanarratives promise but cannot fulfill.

"Courage" opens with the arrival of Becker in Lufafa. The narrator does not explicitly date his arrival, but indicates that it is the early years of democracy: "it was the first days of our freedom" he says (1996, p115). Becker is set down near Lufafa by My Mother's Love, the bus that services the village. Its driver, Banoo, demonstrates an earnest deference towards the white man, despite the fact that it is "not really necessary to be nice to the whites anymore". Banoo's hands "bow and scrape" (p115) as he directs the man to Lufafa. However, it becomes clear, as Becker stumbles through bush and has to cross a river, that Banoo has sent him on a malicious detour.

This is despite the fact, says the narrator, echoing himself, that "These were the first days of our freedom … and there was no need to be especially mean to the whites" (1996, p118). The authority of whites is over, and it is no longer necessary to either submit or resist, yet Becker's skin is still a sign of authority.

He is also 'other' by virtue of his whiteness. The narrator consistently reads Becker's body as a sign of strangeness. The white man's pale skin and wiry red hair are alien and even repulsive. Becker's body has odd associations for the boy that defamiliarize and dehumanize it, as he compares it to the plant world, or inanimate objects. His mother runs the village shop and Becker is asked to stay there. The narrator sees Becker's feet at dinner: "His feet put me off my food. They were pale and fleshy like vegetables, with blue veins in the ankles and sprinkles of red hairs on the toes …" (1996, p122). The strangeness of the white man intrigues the young boy, but it also irritates and disgusts him. The narrator's friend Fish, having once been as far as the bustling metropolis of Fort Alexander, and therefore being a connoisseur of whites, tells the narrator that the white man's penis is "made of rubber" and "has a valve like a bicycle tube" (1996, p116). When they catch a glimpse of Becker swimming naked, the reality is hardly less strange than Fish's lively and grotesque imagination:

> I had thought of him as a pink man, as if 'white' was just a way of speaking – but the parts of him usually concealed by clothing were as white as paper. I pointed out to Fish that his cock did not seem to be made of rubber, but of the same pale flesh as the rest of him, although it jutted comically from a nest of hair like a rusty pot-scourer. He had shocking quantities of hair on the white bulb of his belly and in the small of his back, and

> even on his plump shoulders, like tufts of wiry coir peeling from an old armchair (1996, pp125-6).

Apart from his whiteness, it is also Becker's clumsiness that makes him stand out in Lufafa; he is incongruous and inept in that rural environment. The narrator's local knowledge is contrasted with Becker's ineptitude. He does not, as the narrator does, know the right places to swim; his feet are too soft for the barnacle-encrusted rocks and they blister after mere hours (1996, p121).

Yet Becker, despite all evidence to the contrary, is not a helpless innocent, but rather a representative of the metropolitan, technocratic centre, whose power to 'other' more than equals that of the narrator, though his othering is much more subtle. Why is he in the village? As the narrator's mother remarks, he could just as easily have found a model in the city, so why make the trip all the way to Lufafa? It seems to me that Becker has granted the rural folk a mythical superiority of character. But of course this kind of discourse is actually an 'othering'. His infantilizing role is signaled by the villagers' humourous mishearing of his name as My Old Becker (1996, p123). When Becker peers into the faces of the men of the village, he evaluates them, not as individuals, but as embodiments of an idea, an idea sprung from nationalist ideals. His is the gaze of the ruling party, constructing a metanarrative of liberation.

Becker is possessed of the sophistication of the centre, especially as an artist, a strange and rarified field as shown by Fish's story of the artist who spoiled perfectly good groceries, letting them rot as he painted still lives (1996, p124). However, the villagers are quite capable of "grasping what you might call abstract thought" (1996, p122), as the narrator says. Vladislavić is

careful not to render them simple, as this is precisely the attitude he is critiquing. Becker, as a white, educated, middle-class male, seems the least likely to benefit from the new dispensation, but he has in fact been co-opted by it and comes to represent it. When Becker arrives, he is clad in the colours of the new ruling party. His choice of shirt and gauche attempt at the ANC handshake show that he is aware of the significatory power of national symbols and is embedded within their language. They also show that this story is partly a critique of how new regimes — liberatory ones as much as any other — must through powerful symbols build a national imaginary in order to legitimize their ascendancy.

In the end, Becker chooses the least likely candidate as a model for his statue. Kumbuza is a truly abject figure. As a young man, he returns to the village having lost three fingers from his right hand and gained a drinking problem; turning to farming, he loses a leg under a plough; other injuries include lacerations to his remaining leg and missing teeth. Kumbuza's body is the site of the violence of national memory and identity. His injuries and missing parts stand for the painful history of apartheid, for generations of men blighted by the conditions on the mines and in rural areas, scraping a subsistence living and beset by alcoholism. And Becker's encoding of him as a statue is seen as a kind of disciplinary action. Becker represents art as discipline, in the Foucauldian sense of an apparatus that inserts the body into a matrix of power. The narrator recognizes this role, as he implicates the job of the sculptor with the disciplinary apparatuses of the state par excellence: education and medicine. He compares Becker's instruments to those of a surgeon: "[H]e produced from the silver suitcase a leather folder … Inside was an array of silver objects. They looked to me like surgical instruments, although they also reminded me of Mr Namabula's maths set. There were rulers and clamps, a little hammer, a spatula and a small pair

of calipers with a brass screw" (1996, p134). Becker measures Kumbuza's features (after some consternation from the latter at the sight of this rather menacing display of silverware) and converts the proportions of his face into the symbolic economy of numbers. Fish's apocryphal story that "he had looked through our window and seen My Old Becker torturing Kumbuza, tearing strips of flesh from his body with a pair of pliers, while I sat by laughing" (1996, p135), suggests the symbolic violence of the disciplinary act, and of the symbolic role that Becker is imposing on Kumbuza.

And yet, Becker argues, he has given Kumbuza some dignity back: "'It is not the business of the artist,' he said pompously … 'to give a man what he has never had. But when a man has lost part of himself, it might well be the business of the artist to return it to him" (p132). Of course, Vladislavić troubles this easy discourse of art as fulfilling a reparative or restorative role: does the representation of Kumbuza as courage not elide the difficulties of his past (as metonymic of apartheid trauma)? The narrator is certainly sceptical: "To pick up the pieces, to make broken things whole, to restore the lost unity. It was a laughable claim …" (1996, p132). Vladislavić's position lies somewhere between these two extremes and is evident in the story's heavily ironic and many-layered ending.

The finished product that is the statue of Kumbuza is not at all as Becker had intended it. The narrator first sees it as a young man returning to Fort Alexander from his studies in England. The apartheid government has not delivered what the people of Lufafa had hoped for; basic services are still as lacking as they were before 1994 and the area is riven by social division. Becker's vision of the statue as representing an idea rather than a person has not been realized: "There is

nothing abstract about it. It is not an idea. It is a soldier" (1996, p136). There is a young tout nearby, hustling for a photo to be taken with The General, who turns out to be none other than Kumbuza.

The fact that the statue is straightforwardly representational may be due to the fact that it is attempting to encode a very specific narrative: one could forgive Becker's employers for thinking that if he made it too abstract, it risked leaving the statue too open to interpretation. This is just one level of irony that surrounds the statue. The statue has all its limbs and digits intact, including its trigger finger. Kumbuza could never fight because he could not hold a gun. Yet here he is, immortalized as "a true hero of the people" (1996, p136).

Becker's attempt to make amends for the trauma of apartheid and represent Kumbuza as noble and courageous elides the difficulty of his past; the narrator's scepticism denies the opportunity for Kumbuza to regain a certain dignity from the statue of him. Yet Kumbuza, in a way, does attain that dignity. His tactical use of the memory and national narrative made using his image to survive suggests a different definition of courage to the one Becker sought to portray. The dichotomy on the role of art set up between the narrator and Becker is a false one, Vladislavić seems to say: ordinary people can make a future for themselves from memory and history. Kumbuza and the narrator are linked by memory that is so profound it is physical: "I still remember running my finger over the scars on his leg as if they made a map of the future … I remember, in my bones, stirring a loose milk-tooth with the tip of my tongue while Kumbuza reeled through the door of the shop with a bloody rag pressed to his mouth" (1996, p133). As a "map of the future", the scars of the past are more reliable than the facile promises of the

government, represented by Becker and his suitcase “so shiny you could see the future in it” (1996, p119).

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Of all Vladislavić’s short stories, “Propaganda by Monuments” has probably attracted the most academic commentary. Warnes (1999), Graham (2007), Felicity Wood (2001) and Monica Popescu (2001), among others, have all written extensively on this story, commenting on its ludic tendencies, its devolving use of English and its iconoclasm. As Graham says, in reference to national monuments, “What Vladislavić’s story makes clear … is the ultimate failure of the state to render permanent these reifications of national memory” (2007, p74). I shall not therefore offer a close reading of the entire story, but rather single out a particular scene and offer a reading of what I think most germane to a discussion on the national imaginary in post-apartheid South Africa. The passage I shall examine in this chapter (from page 16 to 21) describes how Pavel Grekov, a translator in the Russian government, is one of the few people to witness the toppling of a huge bust of Lenin in a square in post-communist Moscow. The year is 1992 and Russia is not the only country going through profound political and social transition: Grekov’s position is shown as parallel with that of Boniface Khumalo, the proprietor of the newly-christened VI Lenin Bar & Grill in Atteridgeville, Pretoria. Indeed, Grekov’s presence in the square is occasioned by a letter Khumalo sends the Russian government, requesting a surplus statue of Lenin. Khumalo is an entrepreneur who wants to display the statue in his tavern, giving him an edge over the competition in a tight market.

Grekov receives Khumalo's letter in the course of his normal duties and is instantly smitten — "captivated … boots and all" (1996, p30) as he puts it in his idiosyncratic and hybrid English. When Grekov's superior replies to Khumalo, Grekov cannot help but take over the letter with his own reply. Both men speak English as a second language and the misunderstandings that occur between them are the source of the story's humour. They also trouble the idea of a translator as a "transparent tool mediating unobtrusively between two texts" (Popescu, 2001, p409), and raise questions about the role of English in globalizing societies. The two men's positions are interesting to compare, as Popescu has done. The similarities between them are obvious: both are ordinary men from societies in transition; both engage with signifiers of national memory in transition, Grekov with the bust of Lenin, Khumalo with a bust of JG Strijdom. Yet the differences between them go right of the heart of my intention in this chapter and are centred on the bust of Lenin: how different meanings accrue around it and are entirely dependent on context. In Russia Lenin is the symbol of an oppressive regime; in South Africa, where the Communist Party played an important role in the struggle, he is a symbol of liberation. Musealisation "is both context-dependant and subject to appropriation" (Graham, 2007, p76).

This is the contention that informs my reading of the abovementioned passage. This particular passage describes how Grekov approaches the bust of Lenin in its anonymous square and watches it being toppled by a group of workmen. It is 1992 and such events have lost their significance in Russia. Monuments are part of a nation state's significatory system. They are intended to make concrete national symbols and evoke an affective response from citizenry, while functioning as mnemonic devices. Therefore, their toppling is a major and emotional moment in the breaking down of a previous oppressive regime. But by this stage, the bust of

Lenin has lost its power to inspire anger. It is just another statue in an anonymous square. As Grekov reflects, "How bored people become with the making and unmaking of history" (1996, p18). Monuments are subject to amnesia too. Vladislavić suggests in this story that the status of monuments as the encoded values of the state apparatus and symbols of collective memory may not be as straightforward as the state itself may like to believe. "Propaganda by Monuments" suggests that perhaps meaning set in stone may be more ephemeral and subject to change than is implied by words like 'concrete' and 'monolith'.

In "Propaganda by Monuments", Vladislavić literalises his concerns in the materiality of the city and of the statue. The bust is in a "dead end", literally, but also because it is facing obsolescence. It is headed for the scrap heap, literally, but also, as a philosophical worker tells Grekov, "the scrap heap … of history" (1996, p19). The meaning of a monument is contingent on one's position, one's point of view; this is literalised by Grekov's experience as he approaches the bust of Lenin standing in its square and watches as its expression changes. The statue immediately holds him in his gaze: "The eyes in the head of Lenin looked straight at Grekov" (1996, p17), which recalls the disciplinary, pervasive gaze of the oppressive communist state. However, as Grekov walks towards the bust, his changing perspective suggests the evanescence of power:

> Naturally, the stone head loomed larger the closer he got. The features, at first indistinct, now clarified themselves. The eyes were still looking straight at him, even though he had changed pavements. On a smaller scale this phenomenon might have qualified as a miracle; on this scale it was undoubtedly a question of perspective. They were kindly eyes, if not quite grandfatherly, then more than avuncular; but as the mouth came into

> focus, beneath the sculpted wings of the moustache, the whole face changed, it became severe and irritable, it took on the cross expression of a bachelor uncle who didn't like children. And then, quite unaccountably, as he came closer still, the face foreshortened into friendliness again (1996, p18).

The gaze shifts from being possibly threatening, or at least stern, to kindliness, and then to severity and then back to friendliness. The gaze of Lenin, whether kindly or not, is condescending, infantilizing. It is the gaze of power. This is underlined by its size, which makes the workers pulling it down seem childlike.

Yet it is hard to be afraid of a bachelor uncle, however little he may like children. Inherent in this description is the possibility of laughter, a carnivalesque inversion. This is underpinned by the scant respect the head of Lenin receives from the workers, whose attitude is characterized by a "lack of decorum":

> The one with the drill was skating around on the great man's icy dome like a seasoned performer; and even as Grekov watched, the skater's companion, the one with the clamp, slid audaciously down the curvature of the skull, unloosing a shower of scurfy snow from the fringe of hair, and found a foothold in one of the ears" (1996, p18).

To make matters worse for Lenin, he has dandruff. The carnivalesque imagery — the playful workers and the grotesque scurf — serves to invert the bust's claim to authority. The workers fasten huge iron "eyes" into the head of Lenin that tear it off its pedestal. The head is then moved

on to a truck to be taken away. This iconoclastic moment could be read as indicating that communism is obsolete and must be moved to make way for new symbols. However, this would be far too facile and linear a closure for Vladislavić's postmodernist sensibilities. In my reading of the story, the statue seems to represent the monolithic power of the state during communism; it is a tool of ideology. However, its power as such a symbol is undermined by the carnivalesque atmosphere of its toppling. Further, Vladislavić now has the bust go through various shifts in meaning: it may be a monolith, but what it signifies is completely contingent on the contexts in which it is found.

One of the workers describes to Grekov what happens to surplus monuments once their days as propaganda are over:

> "First the bronze ones. The bronze ones are melted down and reshaped into useful objects like door-knockers and railings. Then the ones of stone: those are crushed into gravel and scattered on the paths in our public parks so that the citizens don't come a cropper. Now for the marble ones — not too many of those — and the ones of display-quality granite: the beautiful ones are sliced up for tombstones and carved into monuments of the new heroes — only smaller, of course, to accommodate the new noses and ears. But the ugly ones … have to be kept, or rather *preserved*, because they were made by famous artists long ago ... and they have to be cleaned up and put in museums" (1996, p20).

This passage encapsulates what I would argue are Vladislavić's intentions in this short story. Firstly, the monuments are shown to be ephemeral. The only thing that goes on is everyday life:

the surplus statues are recycled by the citizenry in their tactical engagement with the city. Secondly, the meaning of the statues is shown to be contingent on context, rather than innate. The worker's description of what happens to the "ugly" ones suggests scepticism about high art, the appropriation of bourgeois aesthetics exemplified by artists like Becker and set out as state policy in "Lenin and Lunacharsky", a journal article fragment that makes up some of the story. The attitude to the less representationalist sculptures attempted under the propaganda by monuments programme is humourously dealt with in this fragment: the abstract statue of the anarchist Bakunin is so hideous "that horses shied when they passed it, even though it was hidden behind boards" and "no sooner had the statue been unveiled than the anarchists, incensed by its depiction of their hero, smashed it to pieces" (p21). The worker's ironic emphasis of "*preserved*" echoes the language of museum and art curators. The surplus statues are no longer valuable for whom they depict, but rather for who did the depicting. They have entered a new market of meaning, much as the bust of Lenin in the context of Khumalo's tavern would come to be "an item of exchange, an object of petty capitalism's desire for newness" (Warnes, 1999, 44).

As the statue is borne away by the truck, Grekov reflects that though it is hard to imagine what could succeed such a monumental statue, there will one day be something in its place: "But that's the one certainty we have, he thought. There will be something in its place" (1996, p21). Grekov recognizes implicitly the ephemerality of monuments and national discourse. Both "Courage" and "Propaganda" dramatize the contingent nature of national symbols and the impermanence of anything in the field of cultural and political representation. As I shall discuss in the next chapter, nations place great importance in their symbols, and to break down the centripetal claims made in the process of nationalist representation helps to interrogate the ideas

of ethnocentrism and the reification of "culture" and tradition. Constitution Hill, and indeed many other sites of memory in South Africa, often refer to essentialist notions of culture and race, or perpetuate the teleological discourse of Rainbow Nation-ism. These are problematic ideas and in the next chapter I shall discuss why the "minoritised" voice of a writer like Vladislavić can help to understand why they are problematic.

3. PART TWO

The second part of this dissertation will discuss interconnections between memory and nation and will touch on problems of representing history in post-apartheid South Africa. My understanding of such problems is informed by Leon de Kock's concept of the seam (2001). The seam, as I shall explain at further length, is a trope for a nation in constant representational crisis. I find it a productive trope because it moves beyond the dyadic understanding of history and identity that inform the teleologies of liberal justice narratives of post-apartheid South Africa. De Kock ultimately argues for a poststructuralist understanding of history; for this reason, I find his thinking resonates with Vladislavić's radical aesthetic, central to my arguments in the preceding chapters of this dissertation. I then go on to discuss the design and building stages of Constitution Hill, from its origins as a prison in the nineteenth century to its appropriation as a site that is "activist and evangelical" (Gevisser, 2004, p511) for a particular concept of democracy after apartheid. I shall then discuss how the site is in my view successful or not in extending a poststructuralist understanding of history a la De Kock to the material realm. In this part of the discussion I draw on the themes I previously noted as apparent in Vladislavić's fiction. The production of a national imaginary in South Africa is dominated by certain modes — the return to originary myths, the appeal to a chimerical unity — and I argue that a contingent, "post-*anti*-apartheid" mode (Kruger cited in Kissack and Titlestad, 2003) is more productive when engaging in commemorative projects. Such modes are often criticised for their lack of a normative project, but I shall end my discussion with indications of how a poststructuralist critique can contribute to commemorating traumatic events in a way that allows for contestation and negotiation and therefore more inclusive modes of remembering.

3.1. Nation and Memory

In modernity, the nation state is ubiquitous. It is as Duncan Brown says "in many ways the organising unit of modernity" (2001, 759). In postmodernity the nation still holds this global political hegemony. But the nation's role in international politics is complicated by the imperatives of post-industrial globalisation. If globalisation in this sense is understood as being characterised by among other factors the increasing speed and ease of mass communication, the dominance of multi-national corporations and the expanding global nature of economic markets, it becomes apparent that the state's role is under constant pressure, flux and negotiation. However, the nation state, Benedict Anderson's "imagined community" (1983), is still a primary part of individual identity and experience and this is underpinned by personal and collective memory, or as Duncan Bell says: "memory plays a central role in virtually all conceptions of identity" (2006, p5). This is complicated in many cases by other affiliations the citizen may have, notably race and ethnicity.

Anderson's formulation of the imagined community accords with a poststructuralist analysis because it posits the state as a social construct and the bonds between its participants, its citizens, as not somehow essential. But it seems to those participating in a national imaginary that there is an essential link between citizens. The state's individual citizens must feel a connection to strangers by virtue of their shared citizenship: "[E]ven the smallest nation will never know of the fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion", Anderson says (1983, p6). The nation state therefore requires an affective response from the subject; hence the importance of national symbols like flags and anthems and the promotion of the performance of nationality en masse, as at national sports events.

Experience must feed into a univocal narrative of nation. As Homi Bhabha says: "The scraps, patches and rags of daily life must be repeatedly turned into the signs of a coherent national culture, while the very act of the narrative performance interpellates a growing circle of national subjects" (1994, p145).

That the state is imagined (Anderson) and performed (Bhabha) does not mean it is not 'real'; it is very real if, as Anderson says, people are prepared to die for it. It does mean, however, that the state must perpetuate a narrative of origin and make claims to an essential identity (such as shared ethnicity) to gain legitimacy. Thus a process of signification is crucial to the establishment of a national imaginary. Of course, this process is by no means a simple function of telling people what to think. All discourse is contested. Bakhtin's centripetal and centrifugal discourses are always locked in a battle for hegemony. And as Barthes shows, people read all texts in a highly subjective field of intertexts. In "Courage", the state's propaganda becomes an opportunity for self-fashioning. The officially sanctioned statue epitomising courage is not especially successful in conveying its intended meaning and becomes instead the stage for the abject Kubeka's own redemption. While for Althusser (1971), for instance, signification is part of the powerful ideological apparatuses of the state, "memory practices are not only the preserve of the state, of manipulative elites, and … neither communal identities nor social memories are homogeneous. They are always contingent, indeterminate and contestable" (Bell, 2006, p15).

The contestation of public memory has been highly apparent in South Africa's street renaming process. This was, and continues to be, especially controversial in Durban. In 2006, the city's eThekwini Municipality embarked on the process of changing the names of streets, major roads

and highways to honour liberation heroes, whether linked to apartheid (Pixley ka Isaka Seme) or not (Che Guevara). The process experienced continued resistance from disgruntled Durban residents. Street signs bearing the new names in the traditionally white suburbs of Morningside and Glenwood were vandalised, spray painted over or simply removed. Then-mayor Logie Naidoo blamed this on "right-wingers" and threatened to set traps for the vandals (Premdev, 2006). This statement and his blaming of the Democratic Alliance for the vandalism suggests Naidoo assumed the vandals were white. But on 1 May 2007 thousands of Durban residents of all colours marched against the street renaming process.

Their objections were not so much against the changing of the old names itself but rather against the municipality's choice of new ones. Many felt that the ANC-dominated municipal government had shown deliberate amnesia, forgetting the role of other organisations in the struggle, even trying to erase their presence from the landscape. The most contentious of these erasures was the mooted changing of the name of the Mangosuthu highway. Journalist Michael Wines wrote in the *New York Times* that year: "Some black Durbanites, meanwhile, were indignant over a proposal to rename the Mangosuthu Highway, a major artery that now honours Mangosuthu Buthelezi, a veteran Zulu politician. They were equally angered by a second proposal to rename Princess Magogo Stadium, an arena that currently honours Mr Buthelezi's mother, a Zulu cultural icon" (2007, n.pag).

But perhaps the most emotional and vociferous response was the reaction from the mainly white residents of Amanzimtoti to eThekwini's plans to rename the town's main road after Andrew Zondo. Zondo was a member of Mkhonto weSizwe who helped plant a bomb in a shopping

centre in the town in 1986. Two women and three children were killed in the bombing and Zondo was sentenced to be hanged. He was just 19. There are many who live in Amanzimtoti today and remember the bombing. To them, Zondo was a terrorist, a symbol of trauma and violence who murdered innocent civilians. They scarcely care to remember him, let alone honour him, in the spaces they use every day. As one of the relatives said: "what happened to my stepmother was terrible and I cannot bear to imagine Kingsway Road being renamed after such a vicious man. I ... travel on Kingsway Road often " (Wines, 2007, n.pag). However, others would place Zondo in the pantheon of ANC heroes and martyrs. The Communist Party, for instance, in a carefully worded statement, acknowledged the violence of his deed, but asked for understanding from the community (2007, n.pag).

The anger and emotional response to the municipality's policy is interesting because it shows how official memory can be imposed and contested. It shows the difficulties of talking about a national imaginary in South Africa: when so many disparate groups have such different notions of the past, their present identities are difficult to include in a unitary nation. This is a facet of the crisis of representation that De Kock identifies with the seam. The street renaming process is also interesting because it highlights how clever the Apartheid Museum has been in creating a history based, in the words of Chaana Teeger and Vered Vinitzky-Sinoussi (2007), on consensus, rather than on disagreement. This is a point I shall return to.

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As the academy has sought to understand the nation and the particular pressures on it, so has interest in studies of memory increased. Bell calls this a memory "boom" (2006, p1). Academics are involved in understanding identity and, Bell says, "memory plays a central role in virtually

all conceptions of identity ... Communal memories act as subtle yet powerful mechanisms for generating and sustaining social solidarity" (2006, p5). Postmodernist and poststructuralist studies of identity emphasise its fragmentation. In times of collective identity crisis, which is what post-apartheid South Africa is undergoing, as De Kock shows, people respond by reifying memory; they "hark back to the past with amplified intensity" (Bell, 2006, p6). This goes some way towards explaining the proliferation of neo-Nazi and -Fascist groups in European states that are experiencing angst as a result of, among many other factors, changing, centralising economic climates and immigration. These groups, which often refer to "blood and soil"-type appeals to ethnic identity, are also an example of how the national imaginary may not necessarily be a state imaginary but rather an ethnic one (Eriksen, 2002).

For Anderson, a nation uses three sets of apparatus to attain legitimacy. The map defines where the nation is; it is limited and exclusive. The census defines who the nation is and whom the state is governing. Most pertinent to my study of course is the museum. Anderson says, "museums and the museumizing imagination are both profoundly political" (1983, p178); they are about "the legitimacy of [the nation's] ancestry" (1983, p164). A technology of commemoration is seen in nations everywhere. This is a production of meaning, "a general logoisation ... Postage stamps ... are exemplary of this stage. But postcards and textbooks follow the same logic" (1983, p178). In "Propaganda by Monuments", Vladislavić parodies the official national imaginary of the infant post-apartheid South Africa with the postage stamps on the letter Grekov receives from Khumalo:

> In the right hand corner [of the envelope] were three stamps ... the largest ... depicted a pastoral scene, with herds of fatted sheep and cattle grazing on fertile steppes; the smallest symbolized energy and industrial progress in a collage of cooling towers, dynamos and pylons; the other was a portrait of a man – a politician, he assumed, or a king. All three were shackled together by a postmark that read PRETORIA 06.01.92 (1996, 15-16).

Like the postage stamps, the head of Lenin, in that context, came to mean something entirely different, a commodity. As Anderson notes, from the stage of general logoisation, "it is only a step into the market" (1983, p182). The process of signifying a national imaginary becomes ordinary, disseminated by mass technology. Constitution Hill itself has a series of postage stamps in its honour, featuring images from artworks that are displayed around the court building. To quote Anderson again, "It was precisely the infinite quotidian reproducibility of its regalia that revealed the real power of the state" (1983, p183).

3.2. Amnesia and the Apartheid Museum

Commemoration is also complicated by the forgetting inherent in remembering. In reference to "The Whites Only Bench", I discussed Shane Graham's phrase "ironic amnesia", the idea that as soon as something is put into a museum it tends to lose its resonance as something with relevance in the present. By seeking to remember, we sanction forgetting. The TRC has frequently been accused of being an "exercise in forgetting", as Derrida put it (Harris, 2002), even as it was celebrated for bringing untold stories into the public domain. We are told to 'forgive and forget'; amnesty is after all etymologically related to amnesia. Amnesia and elision

are inherent in teleological narratives like Rainbow Nationism. Museums and monuments in South Africa have tended to promote this narrative, and continue to do so despite the weariness with "unitary representation" (2001, p287) that De Kock identifies.

The Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg exemplifies this kind of Rainbow Nation museum. The Apartheid Museum is situated next to a mining-themed, ahistoricised casino and theme park, a situation that critics have found incongruous (Meskell, 2006, p170), even inappropriate (Dubin, 2009, p198). However, the museum owes its very existence to Gold Reef City, as the museum fulfils the civil responsibility component that allowed the casino to gain a licence. It was therefore built with big business money in just eighteen months amid a difficult climate of various interests — government, ANC, business (Teeger and Vinitizky-Seroussi, 2007). What some commentators (such as Lynne Meskell [2006]) have failed to note is that the museum is itself something of a theme park. Meskell's charge of incongruity implies the classic dichotomy between museums as serious spaces dedicated to preservation of a true past and imbued with a didactic responsibility; and the spaces of fun and consumption: this division is analogous to the difference between Strickland's museum and high school operetta. Of course contemporary museums must make their spaces fun and consumable too; and this the Apartheid Museum certainly aims to do.

The museum "offers its visitors the opportunity to 'experience' apartheid at various points" (Teeger and Vinitzky-Seroussi, 2007, p70). Each visitor is arbitrarily assigned a race as they

enter and this colours (so to speak) their initial experience of the museum[3]. The visitor is then funnelled along a fairly set chronological story of apartheid, with surprising initial emphasis on South Africa's prehistoric past. Some exhibits emphasise interactivity; it is important that the visitor understand the emotional trauma of apartheid. There is a real Casspir into which one can climb; there are 133 nooses hanging from the ceiling, one for every person executed by the state. The design of the museum itself evokes the disciplinary spaces of prisons or state schools: there is a great deal of industrial-chic exposed brick and steel, and the interior is rather dark and oppressive. Steven Dubin notes that this is deliberate: "the creation of 'hard dark spaces' with grey walls and galvanised metal floors and concrete walls meant to suggest incarceration" (2009, p196).

However, the dimness has the advantage of allowing the visitor better to enjoy the impressive and absorbing amount of archival film footage that the curators managed to find. At the end of the tour, during which the visitor has been guided through a good few decades of oppression and resistance, mostly in black and white, the museum opens out into a sunny room in which colour photos and television footage commemorate the release from prison and ascension to presidency of Mandela.

Mandela rather dominates the whole master narrative of the museum; he is its "consensual hero" (Teeger and Vinitzky-Seroussi, 2007, p67). The message is clear: South Africa has emerged from the darkness of the past into a bright new future under the leadership of Mandela — and by extension the ANC, who are therefore destined to lead the new nation. If one takes this view, one

[3] I found this to be a clever device that highlighted the arbitrary nature of racial classification and the extreme indignity of such legislation as Separate Amenities. However, it has been criticised as "trite" and part of the theme park nature of the site (Findley cited in Dubin, 2009, p198).

fails to take into account the political and economic drives behind nation building. In the case of the Apartheid Museum, it has been argued, one interest is to shore up the ANC's legitimacy (Teeger and Vinitzky-Seroussi, 2007). In the museum's particular memory, there is a set trajectory of oppression and liberation that subscribes to Nuttall's 'decompression' (which I mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation).Teeger and Vinitzky-Seroussi (2007) contend that the museum aims to create a history, not through dialogue and disagreement, but through consensus, creating in the visitor a sense of the inevitability of the current dispensation and its unquestioned legitimacy. They argue that it emphasises the role of the ANC in the struggle to the detriment of other actors. Not that it omits mention of those actors — token mentions contribute far more to the museum's amnesia: "While complete absence may in fact stimulate remembrance by invoking the indignation of those who have an interest in remembering , marginal presence ... may stimulate forgetting" (Teeger and Vinitzky-Seroussi, 2007, p69).

The Apartheid Museum does indeed evoke a sense of the trauma of oppression and considering the interests at play and the curators' limited budget it is an impressive project. Yet it may also be rather amnesiac. In becoming a place for the visitor to experience, it may trivialise decades of oppression and struggle. The Casspir, for instance, is reminiscent of Vladislavić's Whites Only benches. It is in a museum, part of the past, no longer frightening. As Teeger and Vinitzky-Seroussi put it: "How terrifying can a past be if one can jump between roles and just as quickly leave them behind?" (2007, p71). After her experience, the museum visitor steps out into the sunny Highveld afternoon and seems to leave the past behind her. She is being told that the trauma is in that dark past and she can now assume the identity of a South African, a member of the miraculous Rainbow Nation. If the visitor is foreign, she may marvel at this miracle and feel

comforted: as De Kock explains, the international community has an interest in seeing the Rainbow Nation work (2001, p289).

I mention the Apartheid Museum because I believe it invites instructive comparison with Constitution Hill. This comparison is not altogether straightforward because each site was built by different sectors and to fulfil different functions. However, they are both memory sites that encode a master narrative of liberation from an oppressive past. I have outlined some of the problematic aspects of this master narrative with regard to the Apartheid Museum; I shall do so in the following section regarding Constitution Hill. Yet I feel the latter is more nuanced and therefore ultimately more successful as a commemorative project. The Apartheid Museum risks a certain ossification of its message. Constitution Hill was intended as a space for the making of history, not just the remembering of it, and as such seems dynamic. As Teeger and Vinitzky-Seroussi point out, in a museum one is surrounded by the mnemonic message, less able to contest it. Constitution Hill to a degree invites contestation. It was deliberately intended to be inviting to the general public as a space they could make use of in their everyday life. The spaces commemorating its use as an apartheid jail are relatively minimal, guiding the visitor's imagination rather than bombarding her with an aural or visual assault. The Apartheid Museum seems to speak in a constant didactic monologue, drowning out other voices. On Constitution Hill, however, there are moments of silence and moments of discussion and moments when other smaller voices can be heard, telling the stories of 150 years of contested histories.

3.3. The Seam

If the nation is an imagined community, then how is post-apartheid South Africa being imagined? The Apartheid Museum's troubling teleology of history is representative of a triumphalist idea of what it means to be a South African. This is implicated in what Michael Titlestad and Mike Kissack call, after Edward Said, "the politics of blame" (2003, n.pag). They posit De Kock's trope of the seam as offering a more productive mode in which to examine post-apartheid experience beyond the dyads and binaries. De Kock, they say, examines the interconnections of history while recognising the ironies of his own position as an academic writing about this history: "De Kock simultaneously unravel(s) relational knots (in subjectivities, historiography and the literary imagination) while participating, through (his) interpretive practices, in the intellectual politics of interconnection" (2003, n.pag). In his much-cited introduction to "South Africa in the Global Imaginary", De Kock (2001) argues for an acceptance of poststructuralist understandings of identity and nation. For him, there is no unified South African imaginary, only subjectivities shattered by centuries of epistemic violence and division. He argues that the South African imaginary needs to be questioned from a poststructuralist perspective: "If ever there was a need for vigilant scepticism about the verities of reference and for that vigilance to continue beyond the illusions of revolutionary unity, it is here ..." (2001, p288).

Memory sites like Constitution Hill and the Apartheid Museum are representation, text set in concrete and glass and metal. For De Kock, texts produced in the post-apartheid South African situation are marked by constant crisis. The seam is the place where the subject encounters difference and attempts to resolve it "by substituting a myth, motif, figure, trope" (2001, p276).

The writer attempts to reconcile the irreconcilable in a country unified only by geography, but ultimately merely replicates the inherent doubleness. Thus the seam is a place of marginality, liminality. In this it is like the frontier. But for De Kock, the frontier is too easy a place. The seam is a better sign for fractured identities because it is "unsettled, marked by ... strain, contradiction and imbalance" (Titlestad and Kissack, n.pag). Writing from the seam is characterised by desire, the desire for wholeness, unity, authentic selves. Therefore it could be said that the ideology of non-racialism that formed the basis of South Africa's Constitution emerged from the seam. The desire for a univocal history characterises writing in that space of "*non*-difference" (De Kock, 2001, p283). Such representation tells us that "we are one". But of course we — the ever-vexed signifier of South African — are not. At the end of the rainbow, the suppression of difference and the reification of multi-culturalism ironically contingent upon this suppression perpetuate this doubleness.

Complicating this further is the global stake in South Africa's 'miracle' of democracy. De Kock says that the weariness and wariness of an insistence on multi-culturalism that South Africans experience has not spread to the international community. The South Africa packaged for the international market, whether tourist or trade, bears the marks of the seam. The experience offered by the Apartheid Museum is packaged in this way. Constitution Hill too has in parts the flavour of a "theme park" of democracy. The notion of a "Big Five Africa" (Segal, 2006) was carefully and deliberately avoided in Constitution Hill's initial design stages, but its residue remains in subtle ways.

De Kock's solution to this crisis is linguistic and intellectual. He calls for an acknowledgment of the constructed nature of identity. The point is not to attempt to stitch the wound but rather to understand how it is being stitched and by whom. This would free the South African writer from rigid constructions of national identity and allow us to question them. As De Kock puts it, "Once the representational basis of the ongoing crises of identity in South Africa is acknowledged, we may be able to shift from disputing *what* it is our fellows say we are to *how* it is that they say such things in the first place. In that case, we may qualify the perception of ontological crisis (identity fixation) with the memory that identity has always been contingent on representation and is likely to remain so. This requires a mobile sense of language and its referential complexities" (2001, p287-288). That is, as Titlestad and Kissack would have it, "Rather than unquestioningly repeating the orthodoxies (the binaries and dyads) of the seam, an intellectual engaging the South African context should dwell on the pathways of emergent subjectivities and the ways in which they instantiate, cross or complicate their discursive context" (2003, n.pag). This is while recognising the intellectual's own implication in representation.

I see Vladislavić as fulfilling this role as the post-anti-apartheid intellectual. I have already discussed how his writing demonstrates scepticism towards claims to truth and authenticity. I also showed how in *The Restless Supermarket* he foregrounds the textuality of the text, how it is a construction, shaped by the author and by the previous interpellations of its readers. This device troubles the idea of the author as authority and of the text as a straightforward representation of reality. Vladislavić recognises, even embraces, the contingent nature of identity. Writing from the seam aims for a chimerical wholeness; his writing parodies this impulse. His characters desperately long for unitary identity; they try to "bypass the fraudulent

contingencies of the sign and seek a place where things mean what they say" (De Kock, 2001, p284). Hauptfleisch and Tearle are of course prime examples of this impulse. But so is Strickland with her insistence on straightforward representation of history with an authentic museum display. Here I am reminded of Bakhtin's notion of the centrifugal and centripetal forces of discourse: writing from the seam aims for univocal, centrifugal language, while Vladislavić remains centrifugal. As a self-consciously poststructuralist writer, then, Vladislavić is in a position to offer the kind of radical critique that De Kock is calling for. This critique of particular ethics of representation is also applicable to critiquing constructions of nation expressed in the design of Constitution Hill.

3.4. Constitution Hill: "Activist and Evangelical"

In the fiction that I examined in Part One of this dissertation, I discussed some of Vladislavić's protagonists, all of whom are in various ways making sense of the material world. In "The Omniscope Pat. Pending" and *The Restless Supermarket* he problematises the relationship of the subject to the real through language. In 'The Whites Only Bench", "Courage" and "Propaganda by Monuments", Vladislavić stages moments of encounter between his characters and an object — an artefact, a monument — to interrogate notions of history and memory. His writing thus provides insight into how space and material culture, particularly public visual culture, shape identity. In public art and memory sites, like Constitution Hill, collective memory and discourses of community are negotiated and Vladislavić's radical aesthetic can provide tools with which to critique such discourse. These tools include the subversion of the idea of language as providing straightforward access to reality; a description of history and memory as constructed rather than a faithful recalling of the past; the idea that hegemonic discourses are

encoded in art, that art transmits this hegemony and that there is always the potential to resist it; and that forming a national memory is subject to vexation, for instance to ironic amnesia.

In this section, I bring these ideas to bear on the grammar of the design of Constitution Hill. My focus is not on the Constitution, the document, itself but on how the commemorative projects and use of space in Constitution Hill were conceived, spoken about and executed.
Museums and monuments in countries that have had difficult pasts must balance a two-fold imperative: to commemorate violence and trauma, but also to provide a sense of hope and healing. Annie E. Coombes says of such sites that they are “transitional locations that embody the ability of the new nation to rise phoenixlike from the literal ashes and debris of incarceration, death and destruction. Consequently each has to incorporate within it the signs of both the history of total destruction and dehumanisation *and* the triumph of the human spirit over all adversity” (2003, pp69-70). These sites further have to balance the claims of interested groups within the country and “the hopes and desires of a highly differentiated international community” (2003, p70). This accords with De Kock’s assertion that the international community needs South Africa to succeed. Constitution Hill is one such site. In the next part of this chapter, I outline the history of the site and its rehabilitation as a home for the court. I examine the modes in which the complex was talked about and how they reflect the desires of groups interested in its construction. I then go on to examine various aspects of the complex’s design and its museumised spaces, with particular reference to Vladislavić’s fiction.

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In 2004, while Constitution Hill was still in its building stages, Sarah Nuttall wrote that it “emerges from rubble and ruins. To watch it rise is to see a city and a democracy heaving itself

from the debris, carrying with it the physical markers and the tangible echoes of an iniquitous political system...” (Gevisser, 2004, p507). This is illustrative of how the new court was positioned in the history of South Africa as a “campus for justice” (Gevisser, 2004, p507), a home for the central document of democracy that seeks not to forget a painful past but also celebrate a bright future. Constitution Hill inscribes past trauma on its surface throughout, and yet is triumphant too. The role of the court as “both activist and evangelical” (Gevisser, 2004, p508) permeates its design and the exhibitions and events held to promote it among the public. The metaphor of a triumphant nation rising like a phoenix from the ashes of a traumatic past was repeatedly applied to the court in discourse surrounding its conception and construction. Mandela, for instance, said in 1998: “Rising from the ashes of that ghastly era, this new institution will shine forth as a reminder for the future generation of our prevailing confidence and optimism that South Africa will never return to that abyss and indeed is a better place for all” (Segal, 2006, p84). There are few memory sites in South Africa so self-consciously symbolic, so evangelical of democracy. Every aspect of Constitution Hill, from the courtroom’s decor to the smallest mosaic, is granted meaning in terms of nation building and a concomitant construction of the past and future.

Constitution Hill is built on a site redolent with apartheid and colonial history. It is the home of the country’s highest court, which is mandated to enforce a constitution often billed as the most liberal in the world. As well as the court the complex houses the offices of non-governmental oversight bodies such as the Public Protector. What were during apartheid prison sections have been preserved as museum displays with various exhibits depicting prison life. Constitution Hill groups what used to be a fort and a prison with contemporary buildings. The space of the

complex is intended to be open and inviting and linking the disparate communities that surround the site, lying as it does between impoverished, teeming Hillbrow and suburban Parktown. The grassy ramparts that still dominate the Constitution Hill are testament to its origins as a place of surveillance. These ramparts are nearly as old as Johannesburg itself, having been built in 1893 by Paul Kruger. The site had strategic value as a fort for the Zuid Afrikaanse Republiek as it sat on a ridge with good views. It was also itself very visible, which meant that it was intimidating to the *uitlanders*. After the Jameson Raid in 1896, the prison became a fort again and remained one until it was captured "without a shot" (Segal, 2006, p11) by the British army in 1900. The Boers who had occupied the place were incarcerated there. In 1902, with the end of the war, the fort became a prison. This was meant to be a temporary arrangement pending the construction of a larger jail elsewhere. This 'temporary arrangement' remained in place for 80 years. At that stage, only white men were imprisoned there, but 1904 saw the addition of two sections, four and five, for sentenced black male prisoners.

Over its history, the prisons in the Old Fort (as it became known during apartheid) housed a motley assortment of inmates, ranging from pass book offenders to political prisoners to murderers. The vast majority were there because they had been criminalised by the system for being black; pass book offenders, for instance. Those incarcerated have included Ossewa Brandwag militants, General Christiaan de Wet, striking white miners, and Mahatma Gandhi. As an apartheid prison the Old Fort housed a veritable who's who of struggle icons, from the 1956 treason trialists to students who took part in the Soweto Uprising, including Nelson and Winnie Mandela, Joe Slovo, Ruth First, Robert Sobukwe, Walter Sisulu and Oliver Tambo.

Over the years as apartheid took hold, “Number Four”, as it was known in local vernacular, gained notoriety. If one were black it was the first place to search for a missing relative. Steve Kwena Mkwena, now a curator at Constitution Hill, recalls that “I grew up terrified of Number Four ... [Being imprisoned there] was a rite of passage for thousands of young black men and women growing up in a sick society” (Segal, 2006, p2). Such was its infamy that Yvonne Chaka Chaka used it as metonymic for apartheid repression in a song (Gevisser, 2004, p509). Conditions were dreadful, especially in Sections Four and Five, as the racial segregation dividing the country outside the prison walls was extended to those within. White prisoners got more and healthier food and better accommodation. Black men were subject to cruel treatment from warders, including the humiliating tausa dance, and had to negotiate a complex hierarchy among their frequently violent fellow prisoners. Bedding, clothing and utensils were filthy and the beds and hair of the prisoners crawled with lice.

The Women's Jail and Awaiting Trial Block were built in 1910 and 1923 respectively. Female criminals included fraudsters and prostitutes (and the murderer Daisy de Melker) but “the vast majority were ordinary black women, arrested for not carrying a pass, for trespassing or for contravening one of the apartheid laws. These black women were regarded as criminals because of the colour of their skin” (Segal, 2006, p23). Mothers were often imprisoned along with their babies. The Women's Jail was built on the model of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon. It had a circular central hall overlooked by a rather gracious gallery along which warders could patrol. Activist Fatima Meer, who spent 113 days in jail here, recalls her first impression of the space thus: “I had a fleeting vision of Victorian ladies looking down on the ball in progress, but was

jolted into the reality of the prison by a line of stark naked women ... being searched by a warder" (Segal, 2006, p23).

Number Four was always overcrowded but in the early 1980s it became apparent that the situation was critical. On 31 January 1983, the prison was closed. The inmates were moved to Diepkloof prison in Soweto where conditions were so relatively comfortable that it was given the informal nickname Sun City, which it retains. The Old Fort then fell largely to ruin and neglect. The grass grew up around the isolation cells, vagrants slept in the cells of Section Four and metal fittings were looted for scrap. But its situation in central Johannesburg made it prime land for development and for years there were many suggestions as to what should be done with the site. Among these plans were a museum, a hotel and a base for the Transvaal Scottish Regiment. But before any project could get to development stage, apartheid ended. The site had to lie unused a little longer, till it became clear that it was perfect, symbolically and otherwise, to be the home of the country's new Constitutional Court.

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The Constitutional Court was inaugurated on 14 February 1995 with Arthur Chaskalson as its first president, and heard its first case the very next day. The court's offices were at that stage in Braampark and were anonymous rented office space. The court's logo, a stylized spreading tree with black and white figures beneath its branches, was unveiled at much the same time and crystallised the process of signification that would accrue around Constitution Hill. As the writers of *Number Four* put it: "The new logo ... established the idea of a court that would have its own character. [It] was also the beginning of a much larger project, to build a new building

for the new court. This was to be South Africa's first national post-apartheid government building" (2006, p50). But a place for this building still had to be found.

The current site of Constitution Hill appealed for various reasons ranging from the symbolic to the practical. It had a history, and its proximity to Hillbrow resonated with the court's need to be accessible to all. From this time, when it began to be thought of as a space for the new court buildings, the site became imbued with significance, its spatial realities coming to stand for ideas of renewal and nation building. Constitutional Court Judge Kate O'Reagen, for example, said of the site: "it is both looked upon and commands a view, which is appropriate for a court like this" (Segal, 2006, p55). Later on, as the site was developed, literal expressions of transparency, accessibility and the court's oversight role were incorporated throughout the building's design.

The design brief of the court was drawn up with the input of the judges. From this stage of imagining the new space, the discourse in which the court was to be couched was apparent. There was a great emphasis on the need to break with colonial-style, "crypto-fascist" public architecture (Segal, 2006, p63) for a more authentic 'Africanness'. Constitution Hill was conceived as a space for the transmission of a new South African national imaginary based on multi-culturalism. It also drew on a symbolic economy in which the country's flora and fauna are valourised as emblematic of the country's cultural diversity and uniqueness. This is seen, for instance, in the court lobby where multi-coloured mosaics represent various indigenous plant species. The design brief stipulated that the court had to be "rooted in the South African landscape, both physically and culturally". There was a great emphasis on authenticity in both respects. Culturally, the court should not be a "pastiche" of culture but at the same time must not

"overemphasize the symbols or vernacular expression of any section of the population" (Segal, 2006, p70). Representing the country through its natural symbols had to eschew a touristified version of Africa in favour of a 'real' reflection. Judge Yvonne Mokgoro expressed this tension thus: "We needed to describe an African court in all its character ... We didn't intend an African court in the sense of images of the big five popping out of the walls" (Segal, 2006, p61).

Once a design brief was drawn up, a competition was held to choose the architects and design team. This unusual method of awarding a tender was felt by the Public Works Department to be more democratic and in keeping with the spirit in which the new court was being imagined. The competition was open to non-architects in order to give unqualified black entrants a chance and was open to international entries. The competition jury was made up of eight representatives from government, architects, the National Monuments Council and the judges. Two of the judges were former prisoners. One hundred and eighty-five competition entries were whittled down to five. The comments of the jury are also illuminating of the discourse that went into shaping Constitution Hill. Two entries attracted criticism in terms of how they expressed, or did not express, an authentically African justice. Entry 49 was criticised for not being African enough; Entry 13, which included circular buildings reminiscent of rondavels, while praised for trying "to imbue the building with a sense of African-ness", was criticised for this very feature, which could "express no more than the pseudo-authenticity of the game lodge" (Segal, 2006, p79). Albie Sachs also articulated this: "We could have followed precedent and tradition in the way lawyers do. We could have taken a little bit of this building and a little bit of that building. Some people feel ... that's a real court ... if a building has any visual symbols inside they'll also be

borrowed: the blindfolded woman with the scales of justice... That's a distrust of Africa, of our own imaginations" (Segal, 2006, p67).

Mandela announced the winner, Entry 120, at a special ceremony at the Old Fort on 8 April 1998. *Number Four* relates that "Everyone was delighted when the identity of the finalists were finally revealed — four turned out to be South African and the other [member of the team] was Zimbabwean" (Segal, 2006, p84). It seemed appropriate in the context of nation building that the most symbolically significant building in the country be the work of South Africans. The young winners, OMM Design and Urban Solutions, conceptualised a court that was accessible and beautiful, but Constitution Hill was the product of many interests: government, business and various consultants and agencies, including heritage bodies. It was, as Hannah le Roux says, "not inappropriately, like the Constitution itself ... a development forged by collective intelligence" (Segal, 2006, p39).

Budget crises threatened the development, but in 2000, the inner city was showing signs of renewal and the government felt more positive about putting money into the site. Provincial and municipal structures bolstered the project and the sod-turning ceremony was finally held on 21 October 2001. Over the next few years the site was developed, and heritage bodies set about constructing the edifice of memory and symbolism that is the court today. The court was officially opened on Human Rights Day, 21 March 2004. To ensure that the surrounding community and the public at large understood what was happening on the site, numerous programmes and projects set out to engage ordinary people with the court. Such projects included the We the People campaign, which included two programmes: Bringing the People to the Hill and Taking the Hill to the People. The former was concerned with bringing back people

with historical relationships with the Old Fort for workshops during which they could tell their stories. This project included former warders as well as former prisoners. The latter project was concerned with involving people from surrounding communities, particularly poor people from Hillbrow and Braamfontein.

3.5 The Will to an Authentic African Justice

If you approach Constitution Hill from the Great African Steps, you are walking on the red bricks that used to make up the Awaiting Trial Block (ATB). You are also walking between the past and the future: on your right is Number Four and on your left is the western elevation of the court building. At the base of the steps themselves is a large, grotesque sculpture in wood: John Baloyi's *Godzilla*, one of the "sentinels" (Law-Viljoen, 2008b, p184) that greet visitors to Constitution Hill. The tall windows are shaded by small sunscreens, individually decorated by local artists — just one example of the integrated artwork that makes Constitution Hill such a uniquely symbolically rich site and, according to Albie Sachs, "made explicit the connection between art and human rights and established a new paradigm internationally for the role of art in public buildings" (Law-Viljoen, 2008b, p17). That the ATB bricks were used in the steps, as well as to build the Constitutional Courtroom itself, was the result of a compromise. When the architects decided that the ATB took up too much space and had to be demolished, the National Monuments Council objected strongly: the building had too much historic importance to be destroyed. The recycled bricks commemorated the ATB, as do its stairwells, which were left intact. Two are the focal points of the main square. They are topped with blue Perspex that is lit up at night and symbolise beacons of hope atop the ruins of despair. The third stairwell has been incorporated into the design of the court building itself (apartheid-era graffiti left intact) and a

fourth stands just beyond the court building. If you visit as part of a tour, your guide will almost certainly tell you of the great symbolic weight that is laid upon these recycled bricks: the construction of a hopeful present from the material of a painful past.

Underpinning all of this — the integrated artwork and the complex's design — is the will to an authentic African justice, defining itself against colonialism and white minority rule. The multi-culturalism of the judges is emphasised: in the courtroom, the justices sit behind 11 podia hung with Nguni hide; as no two beasts are alike. A narrow, low window running the circumference of the court symbolises a transparent legal process. The demolishing of the ATB was intended to make the court accessible by creating an open plaza in which people could freely gather (Segal, 2006). Plurality, transparency and accessibility are all encapsulated in the logo of the Constitutional Court, which in turn informs much of the design language of the court section of Constitution Hill.

The logo was designed by Carolyn Parton and depicts 11 black and white figures sheltering under 11 branches (there are 11 court justices). The top four branches suggest the coastline of South Africa. It was inspired by a linocut by Sandile Goje called *Making Democracy Work* that portrays a lekgotla (or traditional court) in progress: a group of people sits in the shade of a spreading tree while elders deliberate a case. Off to the right is a TV cameraman, broadcasting the proceedings to a wider audience. This image was chosen as inspiration because it seems to be a kind of justice that is accessible and transparent; and it reflected a return to valuing modes of procedure that were not typically Western. It is also the inspiration for the striking lobby of the court, which was designed under the rubric of "justice under a tree" (Segal, 2006, p204). The

lobby's pillars are tilted this way and that to recall the trunks of trees. The chandeliers resemble leaves and slatted windows allow in oblique rays of light that create a dappled effect. The 'trunks' of each pillar are patterned with mosaic meant to represent the biodiversity of South Africa's flora. There are couches and chairs grouped underneath, offering a pleasant, sunny place to gather. The next-door courtroom has a tapestry and carpet motif that represents the mottling effect of sunlight on a forest floor.

"Justice under the tree" is metonymic of an authentic justice after the injustice of apartheid and reflects a new aesthetic that seeks to give new value to indigenous cultures. As one Constitution Hill tour guide says: "I grew up in a very traditional setting where every time there were quarrels within families, they would go and report to the traditional leader and then he'd summon elders and they would sit down under the tree ... these lekgotlas or kgoros allow me to explain everything to visitors about African justice" (Segal, 2006, p204). The court, therefore, wants to associate itself with a low-tech, family-based, rural style of justice. Its design, as Justice Albie Sachs makes clear, is intended to reject Western notions of legal architecture as imposing and intimidating the public with the power of the state. Judge Sachs describes the Constitutional Court logo as "a radical rupture" with the symbolic language of European justice and with the apartheid state. It was to be "an image that conveyed the idea of a Constitution that protected the basic rights of all our people" (Law-Viljoen, 2008b, p17).

3.6. The Constitutional Court Logo

The elevation of a 'true' African justice could be said to be problematic. It risks a dangerous valourisation of precolonial politics and culture, when there is little to suggest that these would have been good models for a democratic country. However, the question of whether precolonial society was democratic is not for this dissertation; rather what concerns me is how culture is being remembered and placed within the symbolic economy of the state. It could be argued that the logo is in fact essentialising of indigenous cultures. In its appeal to an autochthonous identity it is similar to the coat of arms of the South African state, which features a pair of Bushmen, with a motto underneath in the /Xam language. As an appeal to an essential, originary identity, this is representation from the seam; the search for "lost or never realised wholeness" (De Kock, 2001, p277). Such romanticisation of first peoples is also essentialising. It reverses the "grammar of Manichean inscription — the overwhelming iteration of an order of terms that reinvented people as 'civilised' or 'savage'"(De Kock, 2001, p278); and in merely reversing the value placed on each side of this binary formulation, does nothing to move beyond such inscription.

The reification of originary identity may have emerged partly from the emphasis on revaluing previously marginalised communities that was part of Rainbow Nation discourse. After apartheid, media and heritage bodies, among other sectors, made a conscious effort to recover the memories of indigenous cultures that had been forgotten or suppressed. As Annie E. Coombes says of the heritage sector: "Some of the key concerns emerging from the debates on how to effect the progressive transformation of heritage sites and museums focus on redressing the perceived imbalances of hegemonic historical narrative so that those voices and histories

previously occluded could be represented" (2003, p206). This is important for healing in marginalised and brutalised communities. However, it is perhaps also, partially at least, responsible for a notion of culture as an unassailable, monolithic force that instantiates, for instance, patriarchal norms. Sachs argues against this view in reference to the logo: "The limitations of the old patriarchal structures in many African societies notwithstanding, this way of solving problems [justice under the tree] is transparent and community-oriented". His tone is somewhat defensive, which suggests he may have encountered some criticism, or have some personal misgivings. He goes on to say, "Happily, gender equality is now entrenched in the Constitution and women play an active role in judicial proceedings" (Law-Viljoen, 2008b, p19). His tone here risks a certain elision of the realities of gender equality in South Africa, which is partly what is troubling about much representation from the seam.

The logo, then, and by extension the court space make certain troubling claims about the truth and about the past. However, no official visual culture is straightforwardly interpellative: signs are always open to negotiation. So what is remembered and the future that is imagined are never just received. As Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris and Sello Hatang put it, remembering "is always an active, politically charged, fashioning of the past and of the future". Memory is made in interaction with others, in dialogue. Hamilton, Harris and Hatang say that authenticity is similarly dialogic: "Through dialogue we are able to exchange ideas with others and construct our values and beliefs from bits and pieces emerging from the process" (2009, n.pag). Authenticity, then, is an act of *bricolage*, of self-fashioning. In this sense of the word, the bench that sat in the garden of Strickland's museum was the authentic bench. It became part of a 'living', resonant history, while the genuine article sat forgotten in the amnesiac halls of the

museum. Similarly, Kumbuza strategically invents a history for himself as a war hero, an epitome of courage. The univocal authenticity that Becker represents with his statue is misleading: the state disappoints the people.

Bearing this notion of authenticity in mind, the Constitutional Court logo can be seen to be, rather than expressive of a narrow claim to the truth, a "hybrid compass" (Hamilton, Harris and Hatang, 2009, n.pag). Western justice is based on Enlightenment rationalism, on an evidentiary paradigm. But, say Hamilton, Harris and Hatang, there is deep scepticism about the possibility of such justice. An authentic justice is a hybrid of this evidentiary truth and a radically democratic process: The role of the logo can be understood to represent:

> Public participative justice, inspired by memory and promoting social cohesion, rather than an historical or legal truth, may be accepted as an appropriate vision of justice — as an authentic vision — not because it conforms to the received wisdom about tradition (the grounds on which some support the recognition of traditional law and custom), but because its drives and origins are understandable and worthy of approval ... Its authenticity, however, can only be established through robust public dialogue (Hamilton, Harris and Hatang, 2009, n.pag).

For De Kock, there is no way out of the seam without merely reversing the order of terms. Instead, he says, a prostructuralist hermeneutics needs to be more generally accepted when it comes to interrogating the South African national imaginary. Titlestad and Kissack have extended this to a call for a "post-anti-apartheid intellectual", who can "enter the representational

logic of the seam, to unpick its suturing (2003, n.pag). I have argued that Vladislavić is this intellectual. But do the spaces of official remembering in this country answer this call? I have argued that Apartheid Museum does not; that it inscribes a master narrative that has certain troubling aspects. Avoiding a totalising narrative should be an imperative of any museum that wants to avoid prescriptive interpretations of a post-apartheid narrative. But will it appeal to the visitor? Dubin seems to doubt that this is so. He defends the Apartheid Museum as speaking effectively to the people who were most affected by apartheid and "those who have limited exposure to museums". To him a more nuanced approach will alienate the ordinary, 'lay' visitor, who will very likely not be an academic or a designer "steeped within postmodernist discourse" (2009, p198). Dubin seems to feel that the alternative to a master narrative is an inaccessible, alienating space. But is broad appeal an excuse for a problematic representation of the past? I feel that while Constitution Hill certainly slips into problematic representation in certain parts, as I argued regarding the logo, in other respects it offers a hybrid authenticity: the emphasis is on looking towards a utopian future while providing a space in which that future can be shaped and imagined by the ordinary people who use the site. The museum displays on Constitution Hill are appealing while avoiding grand narratives. A more academic approach to museums need not imply abstruse exhibits and a rarefied atmosphere. One can imagine Strickland feeling at home as curator of the Apartheid Museum. It would accord with her conception of history as truth and her emphasis on the classically didactic role of a museum. By contrast, Constitution Hill as a memory site avoids closure and consensus as it is constantly in a process of becoming; it records many voices; it has open spaces that encourage public use; and it presents ordinary histories as well as the stories of struggle icons.

3.7. The Museum Spaces of Constitution Hill

The walk up the Great African Steps is a walk between the past and the future; there are many such spaces on Constitution Hill. Mark Gevisser, who was content adviser to Constitution Hill's Heritage, Education and Tourism team, says that the complex is an interstitial space: "[T]here is this sense of it being on the cusp between two things" (2004, p511). This is in contrast to the triumphalist, phoenix rising narrative within which the site has also been framed (as I mentioned earlier). The complex, seen in this light, is something that is always becoming, something that meaning can crystallise around but that resists calcification. As Gevisser says: "[The team wants the site] to be used as a place where you find yourself between the past and the future, and where you understand that the only way the future can happen ... is through your agency as someone in the present" (2004, p511). The master narrative approach to commemoration makes history seem to transcend agency and become a linear chain of cause and effect. The Apartheid Museum's message aimed for closure and consensus: its message is that justice triumphed. On Constitution Hill, as Gevisser conceives of it here, there is no promise that struggle is entirely over, that all are equal — but the possibility for healing and for working towards such a utopia is there.

Memory sites that encode a master narrative risk ironic amnesia. Their message loses resonance for their visitors, much as the genuine bench did in the Vladislavić story. Constitution Hill was designed to avoid this and to provide a space where citizens could fashion meaning themselves from the stories of the past. In a museum like the Apartheid Museum, especially as it evokes a feeling of an oppressive, carceral space, one is "enveloped within its mnemonic message" (Teeger and Vinitzky-Seroussi, 2007, p63). Constitution Hill allows far more for the play of

meaning. As a public space, it is intended to invite dialogue about the nation, about what it is to be South African. And it is intended to change as ideas of community and nation change. In "Propaganda by Monuments", the head of Lenin lost its power to awe and impress as the regime crumbled; it became a figure of fun and then a nostalgic decoration in a township tavern. Governments are ephemeral; the imagined community gets re-imagined. Constitution Hill is designed to be participatory; this includes participation in imagining post-apartheid South Africa. As Gevisser says: "If this place is constructed in such a way that it is dynamic, that it responds to what has happened to its society around it, rather than ossifying the grand moment, the 'Mandela magic moment' of the late nineties, then it remains relevant" (2004, p512).

Constitution Hill is of course not just a space for commemoration and memory but also one that is intended to function as public space: space for gathering and traverse, space that the surrounding community can feel that they own. In this way it is not really comparable to 'normal' museums, which are generally there to be looked at. Gevisser laments the demolition of the ATB; but the central plaza in front of the court is now a wide, inviting square that links Hillbrow and Parktown. The court itself is open to the public, as are all court sessions. The curatorial team strove to reach out to the public, especially to the poor communities nearby, with such programmes as Bringing the Hill to the People. Interactivity with and response to the site and the site's exhibits is encouraged. Visitors' comments have been recorded and preserved on small copper 'pages' that have been strung together to form the We the People Wall that runs along the base of one grassy rampart. The idea is to provide "a people's record of the first 25 years of the site" (Gevisser, 2004, p215). There are comments from icons like Mandela and comments from ordinary citizens. These are some of the ways in which the designers followed

the “hybrid compass” and tried to make the site embody the Constitutional principles of accessibility and transparency.

Renewing such a site inevitably involves decisions about what to preserve and what to erase, a decision that is basic to commemoration and archiving in general. The demolition of the ATB is probably the most obvious example of one such decision; but smaller memorials, such as prison graffiti, were erased in the name of restoration. Graffiti in the Women’s Jail was painted over, but Sections Four and Five “resisted reuse ... They will be a place of interpretation only — where you enter and you understand what happened in the past” (Gevisser, 2004, p513). These sections are some of the places where graffiti have been preserved. The complex in fact was from very early on conceived as a palimpsest, which in terms of the site’s architecture means that the traces of the past linger on surfaces that are still used or have been reconceptualised. The graffiti scratched into the doors of the solitary confinement cells is a fascinating record of prisoners’ voices, their minor histories. For instance, as Gevisser says, the graffiti shows that prisoners, even non-political ones, identified their situation with the liberation struggle. The issue of how to tell the story of these ‘ordinary’ prisoners without either denigrating or absolving them was a major issue for the curatorial team, as I shall discuss with regard to the Who Is A Criminal? exhibition.

The court as a palimpsest serves to commemorate the ‘small stories’, the voices of those who do not usually get a say in grand accounts of history. As Gevisser says: “There are two kinds of prison record — the story from above, the official document, and the story from below, the graffiti” (2004, p513). In the prison sections of the complex, the commemoration of the

quotidian has a similar effect. Dubin recounts how the curatorial team had to find a “new grammar of expression” (2009, p165) when trying to depict life in prison without exploiting the prisoners. Having rejected the “corny” (2009, p164) device of representing prisoners with plastic dummies, the team had to work out how to “suggest human habitation, misery and mortification” (2009, p165).

The strength of these exhibits, in my opinion, is that they do merely suggest. Their sparseness contrives to suggest spaces of suffering and a history of trauma without prescribing a positivist narrative. The viewer is invited to imagine the experience of the people incarcerated within, through empathy, an appeal to shared humanity. In Sections Four and Five, the sleeping spaces are suggested merely by blankets laid out on the floor. This provides an insight into the complicated hierarchies of prison society: the dominant prisoners got to sleep in bigger spaces with guards — and young boys, their ‘wives’ as they were called — beside them. The lower orders had far less space and had to lie nearer the door where it was colder. The focus on the quotidian takes on an extra edge in the Women’s Jail, where a simple exhibit depicts how for women prisoners menstruation, a most ordinary concern, could become a source of immense difficulty and humiliation: women, denied panties, had to find shoelaces to hold up their sanitary pads, which often had to be reused as the prison administration handed out fewer and fewer of them as the prison got more crowded.

The exhibition of blanket sculptures has a similar impact. Made from the grey standard issue blankets the prisoners slept on, these sculptures were made to please prison bosses and warders and were a way of breaking free from the humdrum horror of everyday life in prison. They were

an outlet for creativity and a way of gaining status in recognition for one's talent. The sculptures on display include a couch, a vase of flowers and an army tank. Of course there are no 'real' sculptures left, but the museum staff got old prisoners in to make replicas: and like the whites only bench, they lose nothing in poignancy by not being 'real'. A curator said of the making of the sculptures for the display: "We tried to intervene with the ex-prisoners as little as possible. We tried to let the objects they created tell their own stories" (Segal, 2006, p179). This is indicative of what makes these exhibits compelling.

The Who Is A Criminal? exhibition is in Cell Two of Section Four. The exhibit features the blown-up photos (and one blank silhouette) of ten prisoners who all spent time in Number Four. Smaller photos mounted around the wall provide their identities and histories. The prisoners include Robert Sobukwe, Gandhi and a man who was jailed for murder. For Gevisser, this exhibit is the site's most successful, because "it embodies our principles of interactivity and critical engagement" (Segal, 2006, p184). It seeks to invite the viewer to reflect on the fact that political prisoners were treated like murderers; the thoughtful viewer might further pause to consider that a criminal may be created by the law. Many of the men in Number Four were there because they were criminalised by the system, sent to jail for breaking curfew or not having a pass — effectively for being black. Gevisser says: "Understanding that particular prisoner profile is very important in interpreting the site, for it sets the scene for the constitutional rights that the court now upholds" (2004, p515).

Constitution Hill, then, is guided by a "hybrid compass" as a space that allows dialogue and use. In a city where crime and big business conspire to erode public space, it represents an attempt to

engineer a connection with its surrounding community. Whether this has been successful is a subject for another study, as it remains to be seen if the Constitution itself can indeed be made to work for South Africa's dispossessed. But certainly as a memory site and a space for justice (in a broader sense of the juridico-discursive, evidentiary paradigm) Constitution Hill is a space for the imagining of what it is to be South African, without the limits of a master narrative approach.

4. Conclusion

In this dissertation I have linked the fiction of South African writer Ivan Vladislavić to a broad discussion of memory and the national imaginary in this country after apartheid. I argued that Vladislavić's radical aesthetic instantiates an iconoclasm which is important in a time when essentialist, totalising narratives dominate public discourse and memory. I have examined three short stories from *Propaganda by Monuments and Other Stories* (1996) and Vladislavić's novel *The Restless Supermarket* (2001), and argued that Vladislavić is the post-anti-apartheid intellectual who finds ways to destabilise assumptions about history and authenticity, and that such a grammar of critique can be brought to bear on memory sites in post-apartheid South Africa. I took as my study one particular site, Constitution Hill in central Johannesburg, and through the lens of a poststructuralist understanding of identity and history, examined some aspects of its design, discourse and exhibitions. I also briefly discussed another such site, the Apartheid Museum, which I feel is less successful as a commemorative project because of its teleological, master narrative approach.

I began my discussion of the fiction by looking at "The Omniscope Pat. Pending". I chose this story because it illustrates Vladislavić's critique of presence and the idea that language is a

straightforward expression of the real world and the interiority of the individual. The somewhat cranky protagonist's insistence on capturing everything ever in his box is a satire of realist representation. This protagonist, Hauptfleisch, foreshadows that of *The Restless Supermarket*, Aubrey Tearle. The novel also develops Vladislavić's concerns with language as representation and dramatises the instability of signification. It also demonstrates the richness of references and languages within Vladislavić's own minoritised voice. Satire, irony, pastiche and play give his writing a carnivalesque dimension. In this way, his writing is profoundly political even though — if not because — he subverts political discourse. Including a heterogeneity of voices means that his language is dialogic; this is also a strength of Constitution Hill as a memory site that records subnarratives as well as a grand narrative of liberation.

With regard to the "The Whites Only Bench", this destabilising of discourse is extended to a critique of history and authenticity. This story dramatises how what gets remembered is not necessarily the 'true' story. Official heritage bodies can encode a particular narrative of history, but the story is contested and what is given importance in society is not necessarily what these bodies intend. The claims to truth of documentary media, like photographs, only serve to obscure further their constructedness. Thus the bullet that killed Hector Petersen is really 50 bullets in a lunch box; the fake whites only bench provokes far more controversy and reaction than its genuine counterpart in the museum. In this context, I mentioned the way that museumising the past may lead to it being forgotten — ironic amnesia. I later argued that the Apartheid Museum risks amnesiac tendencies in its emphasis on the ANC's role in the struggle to the exclusion of others; and that Constitution Hill is a more dynamic site because it allows for a dialogic remembering.

In “Propaganda by Monuments”, Vladislavić shows how monuments may seem to be set in stone but their importance and meaning can change as their context does. The truth of one regime becomes subverted as another political shift has its turn. Elites tend to engage in processes of signification in order to underpin their claims to legitimacy (as is the case in the Apartheid Museum — though this is not a government-sponsored project). They put forward certain ideas of what they want the imagined community to look like. In post-apartheid South Africa this has tended to be dominated by the valourisation of multi-culturalism, though this has eroded under the strain of the social and political realities of a society marked by crisis. State representation and legitimacy are at the centre of “Courage”, which is a prescient tale of a society failed by its elected leaders. In both stories, it is ordinary people who make what they can of the symbols of the state, negotiating and subverting them.

Vladislavić, then, shows an awareness of the capillary-like nature of power and as such his own position is evanescent. This allows a much more powerful critique of power than a positivist stance. In this way he is the post-anti-apartheid intellectual, able to pick apart the sutures of the seam. Leon de Kock’s (2001) concept of the seam as a sign of a nation in representational crisis is central to this dissertation. He argues that a more general acceptance of poststructuralist analysis, an acceptance that goes beyond the academy, would help those seeking to understand the South African imaginary and its importance in the wider global imaginary. In some aspects of its design Constitution Hill is representation from the seam, notably in its urge to a well-intentioned but flawed appeal to an authentic African justice. However, with a wider sense of

authenticity as being constructed through a wide social dialogue, Constitution Hill can be seen to operate as a memory site with a hybrid compass.

Constitution Hill is a polyvocal space. Its designers and heritage consultants engaged in numerous projects to record the histories of a diverse array of people whose lives were touched by the site, whether as prisoners or warders in its jails in the past, or as the present inhabitants of nearby communities. The conception of the space as a palimpsest means that the histories of 150 years still mark its surfaces. While the court does encode a discourse of liberation that can be seen as troubling in that it expresses a kind of easy decompression, its museum spaces avoid the master narrative of the Apartheid Museum. Poststructuralist understandings of the nation are unlikely to become the stuff of public discourse, but Constitution Hill can point to a sense of who we are as South Africans without the appeal to essentialist identities — a more inclusive, more equal sense of community and home.

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