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Suffering and the Politics of Memory *

1. The social function of the war memorial

What is the function of public art in society? What is the role of war monuments and war memorials? According to Arthur C. Danto, there are »tacit rules that govern the distinction between monuments and memorials« (Danto, 1987: 115), and which amount to the following:

> We erect monuments so that we shall always remember, and build memorials so that we shall never forget. ... Monuments commemorate the memorable and embody the myths of beginnings. Memorials ritualize remembrance and mark the reality of ends. The Washington Monument, vertical, is a celebration, like fireworks. The Lincoln Memorial, even if on a rise, presses down and is a meditation in stone. Very few nations erect monuments to their defeats, but many set up memorials to the defeated dead. Monuments make heroes and triumphs, victories and conquests, perpetually present and part of life. The memorial is a special precinct, extruded from life, a segregated enclave where we honor the dead. With monuments we honor ourselves (ibid., 112).

The fact that in the post-war Federal Republic of Germany (and even in the German Democratic Republic) no monument to the German defeat was *erected*, not even a memorial to the German dead, seems to accord with Danto's

* The financial support for research on this paper from the Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria, and a research fellowship from the Kulturwissenschaftliches Institut in Essen, Germany, is hereby acknowledged. Further financial support was given by the Slovenian Society of Aesthetics. I would also like to express my indebtedness to Mr. Neels Nieuwenhuizen and Ms. E. Wessels of the War Museum of the Boer Republics in Bloemfontein, and to colleagues at the Rand Afrikaans University for their invaluable assistance in drawing my attention to, obtaining and reproducing archival material. I owe Prof. Jörn Rüsen of the Bielefeld University, Prof. Detlef Hoffmann of the Oldenburg University and Prof. Jonathan Webber of Oxford University a great deal for drawing on their resources and participating in their project on Die ästhetische Inszenierung der Demokratie. Last, but not least, a word of special thanks to Dr. Aleš Erjavec of the Institute of Philosophy of the Scientific Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts for being instrumental in getting me to start thinking about the »aesthetics of war«.

view. The Germans (at least the former West-Germans) inaugurated a new kinds of memorials instead. One kind is the shelled remains of some prominent pre-war public building as *Mahnmal*, as a perpetual sign of warning against the horrors of war. One could wonder whether the *Mahnmal* succeeds in making its point as time lapses. In the minds of the second and third generation, the scarred *Mahnmal* easily becomes a scar in the mind. The ever-present sign of warning turns into the ominous sign of humiliation – unless the *Mahnmal* is regularly attended with the ritual of remembrance and mourning of *all* the unnamed victims, and unless this occurs in such a way that the present generation can empathize with the victims by considering the paradoxical and remote possibility that they themselves might fall victim to some ineffable and as yet unforeseeable catastrophe.

The other kind of war memorial is the so-called countermonument. Reacting against the various meanings that can become inscribed in the memorial due to changing politico-historical circumstances, the countermonument destroys itself as a spatio-temporal edifice. It is either »buried« over time (like the *Monument against Fascism* in Hamburg), or it consists of »the disruption of a public space« by colour slides of documents of the Second World War projected on a public building whenever a member of the public crosses a certain light beam which then activates a hidden projector (Young 1993: 27-48).

2. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial

Arthur Danto makes a very poignant distinction between a memorial and a monument: with the memorial we honour the dead, with the monument we honour ourselves. The memorial asks for sobriety and humility on the part of the survivors and the living. The monument, by contrast, is a license for self-indulgence, for aggrandized vanity. This distinction may be true if one considers the differences between the Washington Monument as an obelisk, »a monumental form with connotations of the trophy in Western art« (ibid., 113) and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial »which carries no explicit art-historical references« (ibid.). The Veterans Memorial (in its original conception by Maya Ying Lin and dedicated in 1982) consists of two black granite walls holding back the sides of a pointed 132° depression in the ground. The walls of the monument contain only the names of the more than 58,000 dead Americans of the Vietnam War in order of the dates of their deaths. To this »special precinct, extruded from life, a segregated enclave where we honor the dead,« a bronze statue of three servicemen by Frederik Hart was added as

a concession to part of the public who demanded some kind of »exacting« heroic realism as intrinsic to war memorials in general. Danto describes the Veterans Memorial thus:

> Like innocents ... [the three servicemen] see only rows and columns of names. They are dazed and stunned. The walls reflect their obsessed gaze ... The gently flexed pair of walls, polished black, is like the back of Plato's cave, a reflecting surface, a dark mirror. The reflections in it of the servicemen ... are appearances of appearances. It also reflects us, the visitors, as it does the trees. Still, the living are in it only as appearances. Only the names of the dead, on the surface, are real (ibid., 113-4).(*fig. 1.*)

If one disregarded the bronze statue for one moment, this memorial as an instance of minimalist art is apposite to its purpose. Structurally, it is nearly the exact opposite of the obelisk. Its principal axis is horizontal instead of vertical (cf. Beardsley, 1989: 124-5). Instead of soaring up into the limitless sky, it descends into the earth, obstructing the descent with two walls meeting in a corner in which the names of the first and the last fatal casualty of that war are juxtaposed on two separate panels. According to Lin, »thus the war's beginning and end meet; the war is 'complete' ... yet broken by the earth that bounds the angle's open side, and contained by the earth itself« (quoted in

Fig. 1: Maya Lin. *The Vietnam Veterans Memorial.* 1982. (Reproduced in Danto, 1987: 101.)

Beardsley, 1989: 124). As such, the idea of walls with the names of the deceased engraved on them is a fairly common memorial strategy. One comes across this way of memorializing all over the world.

Initially, the Vietnam memorial commemorates no heroes and no heroic event. With its present overall form, situated as it is between the Washington monument and the Lincoln memorial, the American public can have it both ways. On the one hand, the memorial serves a »cathartic function,« »easing trauma into memory. In this, especially, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is a stunning success. It is the continual witness of tearful homages to the deceased. Flowers and mementoes are regularly left there. These visible expressions of grief are eloquent demonstrations that the individual and collective wounds of Vietnam are still raw, and in need of remedy« (Beardsley, 1989: 125). On the other hand, this memorial confronts the visitor with the stark results of war: people reduced to cold statistics, columns of faceless names of dead people. The memorial itself mourns the fate of the dead. Small wonder it evoked such controversy before its dedication. As anti-representational, conceptual art it indicts the wielders of political and military power to think on the wages of war. I do not know of any other memorial which underscores the tragedy of war so effectively by its understatement of grief and its stubborn, even iconoclastic abstinence of heroism. 58,000 meticulously recorded war casualties overwhelm the spectator. The magnitude of this visual record incites the viewer to produce an imaginative representation of the face of each single victim – an impossible task, which quickly stuns the imagination. Each name then becomes an abstract, de-personalized instance of the universal voiceless victim of the modern war-industry.

3. The Dachau Memorial

The Dachau Memorial by Glid Nandor in the late Sixties also fits Danto's »tacit rules that govern the distinction between monuments and memorials,« but for different reasons from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Although it shares the Veteran Memorial's decided anti-monumentalism, it is not as iconoclastic. Similar to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial the founders of this memorial are the people who survived the events commemorated here and organized themselves in the Comité International de Dachau. Money was raised internationally, and the former West German government contributed DM 300,000 towards the memorial. And like the Vietnam Veterans Memorial this memorial commemorates something which did not take place on the exact spot of the memorial.

The memorial is in the form of a camp fence, but the barbed wire is

formed by the grotesque and partially dismembered skeletons of Nazi concentration camp victims (*fig. 2*). The original design wanted the visitor to approach the memorial from the right or the eastern side, where a wall bearing an inscription from Job 38 would have been erected. Passing this wall, the visitor descends into an excavated space, flanked on the one side by the memorial. After coming to the central feature of the memorial, namely the group of emaciated and contorted figures which the visitor views from underneath, one ascends to a wall on the left where an urn with the ashes of the Nameless Prisoner has been interred.

The original design was only partially realised. The flanking walls (with the inscription and the urn with the ashes) were left out. And although the inscription from Job 38 is absent from the present precinct, it remains an important key to understand and experience the edifice. The inscription should have read as follows (Job 38, 16-17):

> ...[H]ast thou walked in search of the depth?
> Have the gates of death been opened unto thee? or hast thou seen the doors of the shadow of death?

This quotation from Job constitutes the framework of reference, namely of a descent into a valley of death, invoking associations of a trench, a mass

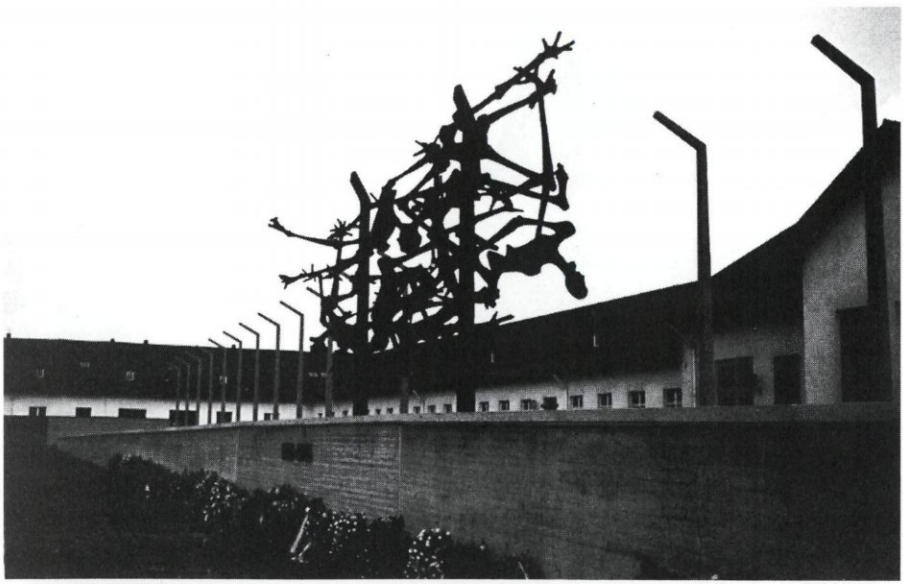

Fig. 2: Glid Nandor. *The Dachau Memorial.* 1960. (Photo: Johan Snyman.)

grave and the pits where murdered victims of Nazi gas chambers were cremated. At the same time an expectation of or a longing for redemption from above is suggested. How does this dialectic of threat and redemption work in this memorial?

The visitor descends into the depths of despair, to be confronted and overwhelmed by the suffering victims of the Nazi system. The presentation of the victims follows the medieval tradition of the triptych, with the centerpiece alluding to the Crucifixion. The portrayal of suffering is grotesque: victim and instrument of torture are fused into one. The skeletons *are* the barbed wire. Nandor's sculpture is expressive of the unthinkable horror of the Holocaust – the co-optation of the victims in their process of destruction (cf. Bauman, 1989: 117-150). In this sense this memorial has to witness for the suffering in *all* Nazi concentration camps. The location as well as the styling of the sculpture alienates the visitor from the portrayed victims. The victims are barely recognizable as human shapes. Not only are they (and were they, once upon

Fig. 3: Jean Vebér. *Les Camps de Concentration.* 1901. (Reproduced in Vebér 1901: 414.)

a time, in the past) physically maimed, but they are also sculpturally mangled. Empathizing with the victims is prevented by showing them stripped of their humanity and dignity – their suffering is complete, beyond comprehension even in the portrayal thereof. Not a semblance of human dignity remains. In front of this memorial one can only mourn the ineffable suffering. As Adorno intimated, to accord the suffering of these victims any positive meaning, would have amounted to an insult (Adorno, 1966: 352).

An interesting feature of Nandor's work is the treatment of the crucifixion motif. The figures in his sculpture refer to incidents which occurred in the concentration camps when prisoners committed suicide by falling onto the electrified camp fence, electrocuting themselves. The few photos of such incidents have become icons of Nazi atrocities. Nandor stylized these incidents to a unity of victim and instrument of torture. Iconographically, Nandor has his precursor in Jean Vebér, a French caricaturist at the beginning of this century. Vebér drew political cartoons for a French newspaper of the British war effort to conquer the two Boer republics in South Africa. Because he did not report on site, but rather commented on events, he chose to portray his views of the progress of the war in terms of well known works of art. Gericault's *Raft of the Medusa* was »quoted« and graphically inverted by Vebér (*fig. 3*) to

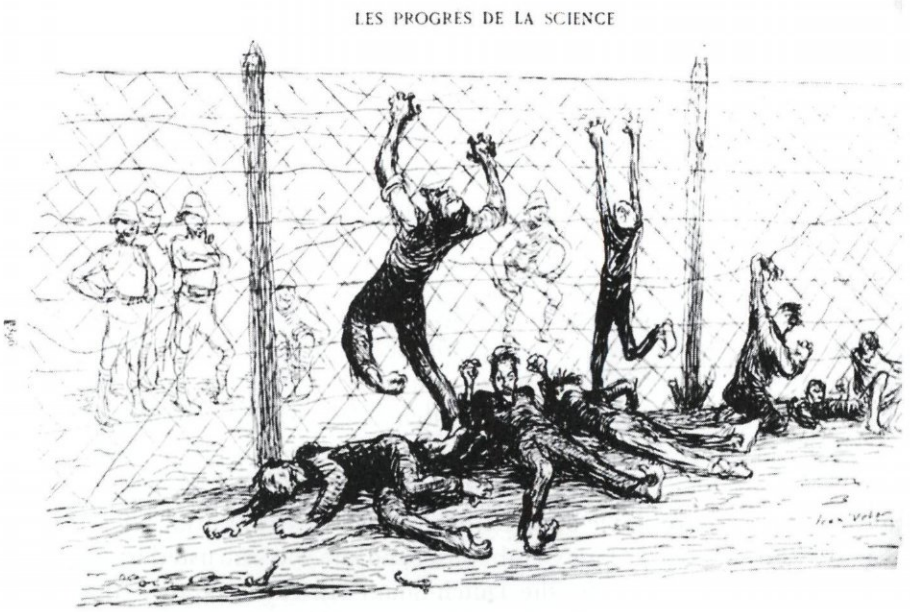

Fig. 4: Jean Vebér. *Les Progrés de la Science.* 1901. (Reproduced in Vebér 1901: 396.)

invoke the utter sense of despair which had to befall the victims of the Anlo-Boer War. One of Vebér's portrayals of British war strategy under the heading *Le Progrès de la Science* shows Boer prisoners of war trying to escape but becoming crucified in a camp fence (Vebér, 1901: 396) (*fig. 4*). Art historically, this is the first transposition of the crucifixion motif to a part of modern industrialized warfare. (This distinguished Vebér's from Goya's portrayals of impalements in the latter's *Los Desastres de la Guerra.*) As far as can be ascertained, Nandor was not acquainted with Vebér's specific portrayal. When one looks back from Nandor's work to Vebér's cartoon, the latter becomes part of the preceding history of the Dachau memorial and represents a step in the process of creating icons of suffering by connecting portrayal of the sufferings of war with the well established tradition of the crucifixion motif, illiciting the same reverence for victims of war as the crucified Christ.

4. The Women's Memorial

As a memorial for (some of) the victims of the Anglo-Boer War the Women's Memorial was informed by a different iconographical and iconological tradition. In stead of the crucifixion motif, the Women's Memorial utilized the motif of the Pietà. Several reasons, from the history of this monument, amongst others, can be adduced for this preference in motif.

Danto's »tacit rules« seem not to have existed or not to have been acknowledged in the construction of the Women's Memorial in Bloemfontein, unveiled in 1913 (*fig. 5*). Like the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, it was funded by public donations. The driving force behind the completion of the memorial was a foreigner, Emily Hobhouse. »That Englishwoman« was a vociferous member of an anti-war, mainly Whig-inspired faction of the British public during the Anglo-Boer War of 1899 to 1902. She did much to alleviate the suffering of Boer people during the war, involving herself very closely with relief aid in the former Boer republics of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, much to the ire of the British colonial and military authorities and much of the British public. The design that won the public competition was by the German architect, Frans Soff. His design was for a monumental obelisk to be erected on a hillside outside Bloemfontein. The obelisk would be adorned by a bronze statue of a Boer woman with two children. The original maquette did not satisfy Emily Hobhouse, and she was entrusted to supervise the making of the statue by the Dutch-South African sculptor, Anton van Wouw, who was sent to Rome for that purpose. Van Wouw made the statue under Emily Hobhouse's supervision: not only had Van Wouw to tear his

own work down several times, but »that Englishwoman« insisted on Van Wouw changing his whole original concept

> Her final judgment was expressed in a letter dated April 5, 1912:
> The standing woman seems to me very good, full of feeling and the sitting mother is better, though still far from satisfactory. The child on her knee is nicely modelled though still only appears to me a *sleeping* child and neither sick nor dead. I suggested he should get leave to go to a hospital and study one or two dead figures (ibid., 513-514),

and (from a memoir):

> Mr. Van Wouw as you know reproduced the scene in bronze. Had he seen it with his own eyes, the child would have borne more directly the aspect of emaciation and death (ibid., 112).

Fig. 5: Frans Soff and Anton van Wouw. *The Women's Memorial.* 1913. (Photo: War Museum of the Boer Republics, Bloemfontein.)

What is the point about the Women's Memorial then? Should one regard it as an unsuccessful attempt at a memorial, unsuccessful in more than one sense of the word, namely executed by an incompetent sculptor, and blurring the borders between a monument and a memorial?

Let us attend to the second problem first. The sandstone obelisk, situated on a hillside as it is, conveys something dignified, heroic, and celebratory. The sculpture's placement on a four-metre-high pedestal in front of the obelisk transforms the tragic group into something heroic, something elevated above the ordinary. It aggrandizes suffering.

This is not so much a memorial dedicated to the suffering of the dead, as a monument for the grief of those left behind. The facial expressions of the two women are not properly visible because of the elevation of the statue. So they do not communicate with any onlooker. And, as Emily Hobhouse correctly observed, the child does not »directly [bear] the aspect of emaciation and death«. The statue does not confront one with the suffering of victims of war, but rather conveys the longing for an abstract restitution. The elevation of the group alienates them from a public.

The bas-relief side panels bear this out. The right hand panel portrays the chaos of the destruction of farms and forced removals to concentration camps. The composition has no focal point, which underscores icono-graphically the experience of displacement it portrays. In a certain sense the panel itself is perpetually displaced: being on the right hand side of the major group of the memorial it is not in the favoured »reading position«, whereas, if one should have »read« the depiction of war suffering in a chronological sense, this panel should have been to the left of the main group, and the death scene should have come »later« in the spatio-temporal sequence. Furthermore, this panel is most of the time literally in the shadow of the rest of the memorial (*fig. 6*).

The composition of the left hand panel is intriguingly classical: it has a receding focal point in low relief (the dying child in the tent), with the foreground figures, the survivors, in high relief and framing the picture. There is a spatial continuity between the onlooker outside the picture and the spectators outside the tent in the picture: both categories of »public« partake in the grievous event of a child dying in a concentration camp (*fig. 7*). But, once again, the emaciation of the dying child is not clear to see. For all the uninformed visitor might know, people are just looking at a sleeping child in a tent. What is sculpturally emphasized, however, is the grief-strickenness of the onlookers. They stand immobilized, they can only look on, they cannot relieve anything. The spatial continuity between the onlooker and the figures in the bas-relief (linked with the chronological continuity between the on-

Fig. 6: Anton van Wouw: Right bas relief of *The Women's Memorial.* 1913. (Photo: War Museum of the Boer Republics, Bloemfontein.)

Fig. 7: Anton van Wouw: Left bas relief of *The Women's Memorial.* 1913. (Photo: War Museum of the Boer Republics, Bloemfontein.)

lookers and the figures in the picture at the time of the unveiling of the memorial), taken together with the elevation of the main statue, makes this memorial to »broken-hearted womanhood« and »perishing childhood« a monument to endurance through and in spite of grief. It is a monument not only to, but also *for* the grief-stricken survivors.

This becomes clear when one reflects on the so-called incompetence of the sculptor. If Rodin could have carried out the commission for this memorial, the sculpture would not have landed on a pedestal. As in *The Burghers of Calais*, the onlooker would have confronted at eye-level the expression of various dimensions of human suffering. To achieve this communication of the expression of suffering, Rodin's figures would have been more dynamic (instead of being completely immobile like Van Wouw's), utilizing the expressive features of the anatomy of the body in different kinds of postures. Rodin's figures would have been less heavily clad and much more tense. (That is, if one takes it for granted that he would not employ a similar approach to this topic as he did for the Balzac Memorial.)

Van Wouw's alleged inability to render suffering in such terms as Rodin's accorded well with the cultural background of the public for whom this memorial was commissioned. If Rodin's Balzac memorial caused an outrage in France, and if his Calais memorial was controversial, his possible portrayal of Boer suffering would not have been acceptable in South Africa at that time. A significant reason was the conflict of interest between Emily Hobhouse's urge to commemorate the victims, and the Boer people's need for a monument. A tug of war, so to speak, ensued: to whom did (the recollection of) the dead belong? Where should they be located in history – on the side of the Boer people, or on the side of humanity? For what cause did they die?

Emily Hobhouse was, for her time, a very emancipated woman and, although from a religious background (she was the daughter of an Anglican vicar), a free thinker. Knowing that the practice of concentration camps during the Anglo-Boer War contravened the Hague Convention of 1899, and that the British military authority was covering up many of the atrocities and commiting many other atrocities unwittingly through neglect and logistical incompetence, she recorded meticulously incidents and even statistics about the camps. She could be called the initiator of investigative journalism in South Africa for having photographs taken to record the extent of famine and illness in the camps. Having them published in Britain could persuade the British electorate to press for an early end to the war (*fig. 8*). In the course of the war, approximately 26,000 women and children died in these concentration camps – that is approximately 10% of the white population of the former Boer republics at the time. Emily Hobhouse also started to keep record

of concentration camps for blacks, but, under colonialist (i.e., racist) rule, the facts were inaccurate and very hard to come by.

The Boer women, acting against an unwritten rule of Victorian society to have respect for the dead and make no effigy of them, also had photographs taken of their dead children, but only if they were not emaciated. The purpose of these photographs was to preserve a recollection of the child, especially for the father and husband who was fighting on commando or was in exile in Bermuda, St. Helena, India or Ceylon. Understandably, the women wanted to retain the most positive recollection of the children that was possible under the circumstances (*fig. 9 & 10*).

Victorian composure prevailed in grief, as is also evident from many letters from the concentration camps. Most letters illustrate the fact that the

Fig. 8: Abraham Carl Wessels photographed in the Bloemfontein Concentration Camp. (Photo: War Museum of the Boer Republics, Bloemfontein.)

Boer people were by and large an agricultural, non-urbanized community who could not avail themselves of the amenities of urban culture such as artistically appropriate expressions of emotions. That accounts for the fact that there are virtually no artistic renditions or representations of concentration camp experiences by the victims themselves. One has also to take into account the effect of military censorship on letters from the concentration camps: the precise conditions of these camps were forbidden topics to mention to the outside world. Therefore the letters were very stereotyped, and conceived only as a form of rudimentary communication. The rhetoric of Victorian society dominated the letters, some of them with excruciatingly sad news. In a sense the form of the letter suppressed the content. The first page was usually framed in black, so the addressee knew he (usually he) was receiving bad tidings. But the greater part of the letter was taken up by writerly

Fig. 9: An unidentified occupant of the Bloemfontein Concentration Camp. (Photo: War Museum of the Boer Republics, Bloemfontein.)

formalities. A letter from a concentration camp sounded much like the following (in translated form):

> My beloved and never forgotten husband,
> I am allowing myself to take up the pen to inform you about the well-being of all our beloved ones, hoping to hear the same from you. Thank you for your last letter which reached us two months after you wrote. (Alternatively: I have not heard anything from you since ..., but got some news about you from Uncle X who saw you last at ...) Do you still have enough money? There is not much news to relate from the camp. (What followed then was usually an extensive report on the health and well-being of relatives and friends. On the last page of the letter the real news was broken:) A week ago our little son/daughter/children/old father/old mother died after a terrible suffering of inflammation. Now I must say good bye with the pen, but never with the heart, and with a kiss of love.
> Your never forgetting wife/mother/aunt. (In the Dutch-Afrikaans of the time

Fig. 10: Photo of a girl aged 18 who died in the Bloemfontein Concentration Camp. It was her last wish that a ribbon embroidered by herself with the flag of the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (Transvaal) be tied to her breast, and that her corpse be photographed in this way. The photo had to be sent to her exiled father in Ceylon. (Photo: War Museum of the Boer Republics, Bloemfontein.)

this was written in the formal mode, and the letter was signed formally with initials and surname.)

The inability to express their grief in an appropriate form was substituted by the apparently trivial but very minute recreation of a once habitable geography by musing about the whereabouts of releatives. That served as a restitution of a lost everyday world. On the other hand, the inability to give rhetorically appropriate expression to grief was enhanced by the pervasiveness of a very pious, albeit fatalistic, religiosity amongst the Boer population. The news in the letters is regularly interspersed with phrases interpreting their fate as a punishment from God for unspecifiable sins, acquiescing like Job in their fate: »The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the Name of the Lord,« or »Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil?«

It is safe to conclude that grief and mourning was suppressed rather than vented in the Calvinist Boer culture of the times. What remained and was fostered, especially after the war, was a sense of injustice and humiliation. Under the reconciliation policy of Louis Botha, the former Boer general who became Prime Minister of the newly created Union of South Africa in 1910, this sense of loss developed into a subterranean eternal grudge: instead of being used to inculcate remembrance of the dead, the war experience of the Boer people was politicized and transformed into an index of indelible harm done by the imperialistic British, extolling therefore a terrible price for the country. The idea, then, of a memorial to the women and children who »paid« with their lives in the concentration camps was received favourably as an opportunity for the survivors to »pay« their »debts« to the perished generation. One way of »making good« to those who had lost their lives was to elevate them to the rank of martyrs for freedom, and thereby alleviate (at least for the survivors) the inflicted humiliation of being robbed of everything dear. Tormented and emaciated figures confronting one at a memorial would have offended the taste of the public who supported the erection of this edifice. In a very short time the memorial was converted, in spite of a pervasive iconoclastic Calvinism, into a shrine: not only were the ashes of Emily Hobhouse interred at the foot of the obelisk, but the »father of the nation« (the last president of the Orange Free State, Marthinus Theunis Steyn), the »hero of the war« (General Christiaan de Wet), as well as the »man of God« (Reverend J.D. Kestell) were buried within the precincts of the memorial. Their graves, and the authentic presence of their remains, serve to remind the visitor of a trinity of civil virtues: love of the fatherland, braveness, and unwavering faith. The lives of the people commemorated are enshrined in

the memorial as the ideals of the survivors. The survivors participate in the lives and deaths of the people commemorated by having the latter re-presented and re-cast in the image of their experience of hardship. Thus is the experience of hardship transformed *ex post factum* into the virtues of endurance, of hope, and of restitution. The memorial becomes a nationalist shrine.

5. From aesthetic ideology to moral imperative: Saving the Women's Memorial from its institutionalization

I mentioned previously a clash of interests between Emily Hobhouse and the Boer people. She wanted a memorial to »broken-hearted womanhood« and »perishing childhood,« they wanted a vehicle of restitution. Emily Hobhouse understood this well. In her dedication speech she mentioned compassionately »the supreme offering [that] was made, the supreme price [that] was paid«. »[The Dead] will live within us *not* as memories of sorrow, but of *heroic inspiration.*« And she exhorted the Boer people: »When you remember the ill done, remember also the atonement made« (Hobhouse, 1984: 404-5). Her text, for the occasion, allowed for popular sentiments.

But her text conveyed other sentiments as well. The climax of her speech contains these words:

> »Your visible monument will serve to this great end – becoming an inspiration to all South Africans and to the women in particular. ...
> For remember, these dead women were not great as the world counts greatness; some of them were quite poor women who had laboured much. Yet they have become a moral force in your land. ...
> And their influence will travel further. They have shown *the world* that never again can it be said that woman deserves no rights as Citizen because she takes no part in war. This statue stands as a denial of that assertion. ...
> My Friends: Throughout the world the Woman's day approaches; her era dawns. Proudly I unveil this Monument to the brave South African Women, who, sharing the danger that beset their land and dying for it, affirmed for all times and for all peoples the power of Woman to sacrifice life and more than life for the common weal« (Hobhouse, 1984: 406-7).

What strikes one as remarkable is the elegant, unabashed feminism of Emily Hobhouse, and the consequent direction of her particularization and universalization. Although hardly anything novel, that is philosophically the interesting point about her interpretation of the history of the suffering of the Boer women and children. Emily Hobhouse elevates the Boer woman to the ranks of the Universal Woman's struggle for recognition. And the Boer woman forms part of a whole which transcends herself: she fights along with other women in that part of the world. The meaning of her struggle is not parochial, but universal. It is a contribution towards a greater solidarity of human-

kind. That is what makes her struggle moral, and allows the Boer woman to teach others a lesson in history which speaks accross the political divide between Boer and British, between white and black. But it is exactly this point that has, very significantly, been censored – omitted – in later commemorative issues of Miss Hobhouse's dedication speech. I quote the censored passages (indicated by []) at length:

> »In your hands and those of your children lie the power and freedom won; you must not merely maintain but increase the sacred gift. Be merciful towards the weak, the down-trodden, the stranger. Do not open your gates to those worst foes of freedom – tyranny and selfishness. [Are not these the withholding from others in your control, the very liberties and rights which you have valued and won for yourselves? ...]
> ... [We in England are ourselves still but dunces in the great world-school, our leaders still struggling with the unlearned lesson, that liberty is the equal right and heritage of every child of man, without distinction of race, colour or sex. A community that lacks the courage to found its citizenship on this broad base becomes a 'city divided against itself, which cannot stand'.]
> [We too, the great civilized nations of the world, are still but barbarians in our degree, so long as we continue to spend vast sums in killing or planning to kill each other for greed of land and gold. Does not justice bid us remember today how many thousands of the dark race perished also in Concentration Camps in a quarrel which was not theirs? Did they not thus redeem the past? Was it not an instance of that community of interest, which binding all in one, roots out racial animosity? ...]

Philosophically speaking, Emily Hobhouse takes the stand of a moral universalist. There are universal moral principles which imbue human actions in time and in places with moral meaning when the actions contribute towards the eventual realization of these principles (cf. Roberts 1991: 273). Such principles are, amongst others, the great ideals of the Enlightenment, including liberty as an equal right. This morality legitimizes itself through its purported moral weight, its capacity to extend itself unreservedly. No exception should be allowed. What is good for the particular can only be good if it would be good for all. The morality of one specific event or action is contingent upon its relationship with the universal principle, i.e. whether it can be an instance, an exemplary embodiment, of that principle. When the action is without precedent, or unrelated to any universal principle, its moral relevancy (if at all) is difficult to assess. But when the action in its uniqueness sets an example which should be imitated, it embodies the moral principle in an original sense. This explains the preponderance of the hero as a cultural topos in Emily Hobhouse's thinking and in the culture of war memorials until after World War I. The idea of the hero embodies moral and aesthetic principles

at the same time. Perhaps it is at this juncture that feminist readings of the Women's Memorial (cf. Cloete 1992, Landman 1994) have a point, but, then, I think, for the wrong reason. The Women's Memorial – from Emily Hobhouse's viewpoint – was not to enshrine the Afrikaner nationalist male perception of the *volksmoeder*. Feminists would have a point, however, if they raise the issue of the honouring of the memory of Emily Hobhouse. It is definitely a travesty to have had the name of a moral universalist, and a pacifist at that, bestowed on a Daphne fighter class submarine of the South African Navy. It is a telling instance of the deafness of the Afrikaans dominated political establishment to the principles of Emily Hobhouse, a deafness that was even intellectually engineered – by politicians who extolled the virtues of Jan F.E. Celliers' *man wat sy man kan staan.*

The thrust of Emily Hobhouse's interpretation of the Boer woman's suffering as a symbol of the universal woman is to hold the Boer woman up as an example not only for the surviving Boer people but also for the world to emulate, should similar circumstances obtain. True to the classical conception of the sublime, her aestheticizing conception of tragic heroism assumes a strength of the individual, the perseverance of the subject, despite the »irresistible power« of the »general«. The individual – the hero – embodies a far greater and exalted substance which can transcend its own historical limitations.

But there is something ambivalent in the idealist conception of the hero (something Beethoven realized with the dedication of his Third Symphony and the subsequent revision of that dedication). Does the hero represent the attainment of universality, or is the hero only a symbolical embodiment of the universal? In the first instance the hero is monumentalized, in the second instance the hero is functional for the commemoration of the universal significance of a historical action. The reception of the Women's Memorial under the circumstances of 1913, and the subsequent institutionalization of that reception in Afrikaner culture, favoured the trend of monumentalizing the suffering of the Boer women and children, turning it into a metaphor of sacrifice that gives the descendants a right to claim the land:

> If one could call it sweat for the hero to fight for the fatherland, and, loaded with fame, sacrifice himself for freedom, nation and country, what respect does the tender woman command who, herself already in the claws of death, sees one beloved after the other entering their graves! And yet, she exhorts her husband and sons proudly not to be concerned about her, but to persist in the struggle! (Pres. M.T. Steyn, quoted in Van der Merwe, s.a. [but probably written between 1926 and 1941]:6.)

In this way the Women's Memorial expresses a universalized impera-

tive: it mobilizes the Boer people to see a particularized significance in the suffering of their kin. This is an understandable reaction, and did indeed serve as a consolation, especially in 1913. But it is clear how this interpretation of the meaning of historical suffering is immediately restricted: it ignores the recorded fact (by Emily Hobhouse, in her war diaries, and explicitly referred to in her dedication speech) that according to official figures, 13 315 Africans also died in English concentration camps (Spies, 1977: 266; cf. Hobhouse 1902: 350-355), and it blots out the moral dimension of this commemorative sign, i.e. to remind people of the horror that once was and that may never occur again, not only *to* them but also never *by* them. The censored reprint of Emily Hobhouse's dedication speech in 1963 thus confirms a tendency that was started by the process of the institutionalization of the Women's Memorial, i.e. to monopolize the meaning of the suffering of the war for whites only. Evidence for this can be found in Van der Merwe's undated brochure, written some time between 1926 and 1941: even the latter shuns all references to the suffering of black people during the Anglo-Boer War. By disavowing the memory of 13 000 black concentration camp victims, the Afrikaner circumvented the issue of black sacrifice for the sake of soil and freedom. By the same token Afrikaner nationalism internalized imperialism, rather than expurgating it. That would also be the reason why many Afrikaners would still insist on the uniqueness of the Boer concentration camp trauma – it affords them a claim to political power which they have earned collectively through the suffering of (some of) their forebears. It usually comes as a shock to them to hear of black concentration camp victims, as well as the record of even greater sufferings not so long after the Anglo-Boer War and not so far removed from the former Boer republics. The mortality figures on the side of the indigenous population of the Boer republics is nearly eclipsed by the death toll of the genocide on the Herero and Nama in German West Africa (today's Namibia). From 1904 to 1907 65 000 Herero and 10 000 Nama were driven into the desert by the colonial German authority, to die there of hunger and thirst. That was the colonialist response to an uprising (Chalk & Jonassohn 1990: 230-248). And the concentration camps of the Anglo-Boer War had their precursors in the *reconcentrados* of the Spanish-Cuban War of 1896, in which more than 100 000 Cubans lost their lives (Spies 1977: 148). To wrest the meaning of the concentration camp history from its nationalist mould may offer a way to the search for justice. Instead of fetishizing a historical instance of suffering by elevating it to the ultimate instance of suffering in a limited universe of suffering and injustice, war memorials should facilitate the ability to recognize suffering whenever and wherever it may occur.

It is for the sake of the search for justice that the true war memorial functions as *Mahnmal*. It speaks silently on behalf of a »we« regardless of gender, class or race, and it seems to say that as a particular people we have come to know what suffering entails, and we shall never let it happen again, neither to ourselves *nor to any other human being*. The future course of history has to be different from what is commemorated by this monument.

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