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## Breslauer Symposium

### Title

"Today It Feels Good to be an African": Nationalist Chronotopes, Freedom Park and the "Struggle" for National Identity in South Africa

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### Statement of purpose

The purpose of the paper will be to explore how narratives of freedom, identity and belonging are inscribed through the aesthetics, architecture and planning of Freedom Park to legitimate the nationalist discourse. I will explore how the site is produced at the intersection of discourses of collective amnesia/ erasure surrounding the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and attempts to reposition South Africa within the shifting global political economy and tourism. I will argue that the aesthetic experience and narrative structure of the Freedom Park sets up an intended framework in response to a discourse of organicist/universalist multiculturalism – which are central to the “new” South African nationalist imaginary. This points to how the reworking of national memory and identity within Freedom Park is situated within the dialectical relationship between a nascent South African nationalism and global neo-liberal market capitalism. Furthermore, I hope to problematize the idea of “resistance” to the effects neoliberalism, primarily because the project captures the national Imaginaire whilst simultaneously being itself the sign of forgetting.

In (post)-apartheid South Africa, the enclave has re-emerged as particular neo-liberal socio-economic formation through which urban space is being constituted. Decentralized market driven urban growth and the proliferation of enclaves in the peri-urban hinterlands of Johannesburg constitutes a “polyglot, polycentric poly-cultural pastiche”, producing a distinctive balkanized, neo-liberal, (post)-apartheid landscape of variegated theme parks with premium infrastructure, but of increasing enclaves of poverty. These shifts have also been accompanied by a cultural and ideological reconfiguration which has changed how some might experience social being and citizenship. The Freedom Park Heritage Project<sup>1</sup> in Tswane (formerly known as Pretoria), South Africa aims to present new perspectives of South African history under the Rubicon of the

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The project is expected to be complete by 2007 - -the first phase, completed at a cost of R 45 million (7.5 million USD) involves the design and construction of a Garden of Remembrance for the country’s departed freedom fighters and infrastructure development. In addition to the Garden of Remembrance, Freedom park will consist of The Dream - a museum, Pan-African Archives and an audiovisual library, while phase three will consist of an amphitheatre, Moshate (presidential hospitality suite) and commercial facilities.

“African Renaissance”, challenging traditional narratives through the re-interpretation of previous heritage sites, as well as providing an ideological alternative to colonial and apartheid historiography. The spectacle of national unity within Freedom Park reflects the political anxieties of a new non-racial, post-apartheid multicultural age through the invention of a shared national culture, shared collective memory – represented through the Universalist tropes of suffering, forgiveness and reconciliation, but also through nationalist, nativist, organicist discourses.

**8 May 1996:** On the occasion of the adoption of the Constitution Bill by the Constitutional Assembly, then deputy-president Thabo Mbeki, delivered the now famous “I am an African” speech on behalf of the African National Congress (ANC). This speech pronounced a strategy of decolonization through an inclusive ideology for all ethnic groups and as well as a pan-Africanist vision for the continent, which came to be known as the “African Renaissance”. The concept of the African Renaissance was promoted as President Mbeki’s distinctive contribution to the presidency, as opposed to the image of South Africa as a “rainbow nation” which had epitomized then President Nelson Mandela’s government of National Unity from 1994 to 1998.

**March 2004:** On a cool Monday morning traditional leaders joined South African President Thabo Mbeki at the 53ha Freedom Park Memorial site on a hill outside the nation’s capital – Pretoria - to consecrate the newly proclaimed heritage site with the traditional casting way of evil spirits. Formerly a military outpost during the South African War, Salvokop hill presents encompassing views of the nation’s capital, including foundational icons of the apartheid state and the British colonial administration, with the Voortrekker Monument – the national monument most closely associated with Afrikaner nationalist ascendancy - to the south west and the Union buildings - the nation’s seat of power - to the north, respectively. In addition to these well documented national icons to colonialism and apartheid, the site encompasses views of lesser known Afrikaner nationalist monuments such as Church Square, Skanskop and Klapperkop.

Beyond the commanding gaze of the park, buried within the bowls of the earth in Barberton lie early traces of one of the most ancient findings of early life forms on earth and geological formations. Meanwhile, below the hill, bearing the hallmark of apartheid racial planning. Lies an assemblage of worker’s housing, separated from the railway lines leading into Pretoria Station by an indifferent stretch of veldt. From the crowded informal taxi rank and market that twitch slowly in late morning sun while, life goes on as always beneath sturdy industrial flank of Pretoria Station, which hovers mutely between it and the distant hill.

Above the sound of speeding cars on the N1 Highway below, President Mbeki told a gathering of 500 guests that Freedom Park would stand as a monument to South Africa’s democracy. President Mbeki also said that

Freedom Park would “not be a place of grief and mourning, but of celebration” and that the Garden of Remembrance would be a “a tribute to all African and human dignity, and a place for the renewal of the human spirit”.

The concept of an “African Renaissance” became a driving force in the promotion of the rebirth of Africa and a renewal of African identity. Central to the African Renaissance and the construction of a new national identity has been a drive to Africanize historiography. However it can also be a way of managing the more contradictory and potentially explosive aspects of cultural and political heterogeneity<sup>2</sup>. The concept of “heritage” has thus circulated in particular ways to construct a new national identity of multiculturalism and pan-Africanism at the moment when South Africa was employing the official rhetoric of “nation-building” as a strategy of unification. Freedom Park will be a broad presentation of the entire history of South Africa challenging traditional narratives through the re-interpretation of previous heritage sites. The objectives of Freedom Park will be to improve accessibility of heritage, arts and culture in the hope of providing new and inclusive perspectives which celebrate “national diversity” as well as providing an ideological alternative to colonial and apartheid historiography. As such Freedom Park forms an integral part of the states’ process of nation building and “national reconciliation”.

Freedom Park is designed not only as a site where everything can be collected and arranged to represent progress and history. Freedom Park is also constructed as an apparatus which aims to incorporate the individual into a single unified total experience of the state, through an embodied experience of past trauma which is represented metonymically through the careful spatial ordering of the site. Within this ritualized spatial arrangement, there is an attempt to suture the “objective” and subjective view points into a single nationalist interpretive framework which collapses the boundary between the “nation”, “state”, and territory, within normative understandings of “citizenship”. And thus displacing subjectivity and potentially dissenting voices. Early planning diagrams of Freedom Park Heritage site, showing Landscape plan and

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<sup>2</sup> The *I am an African* speech delivered by President Mbeki implies a “tripod in motion” of: identity; existence across time; and locality. The categories first person singular/plural are cognitively manipulated throughout the speech producing different vantage point shifts in order to expand the different categories to absorb diverse identities and temporalities within a spatial domain. As a result the speech contains perspective and viewpoint transfers - which imply conceptual identity transformations.

Development framework with proposed urban development corridors from Salvo Village to Pretoria Central across the railway lines<sup>1</sup>

Phase One of Freedom Park (2003-2004) entails infrastructure development and the Garden of Remembrance; Phase Two (2004-2006) consists of “The Dream” (museum), Pan –African Archives and an Audio-visual library, while Phase Three (beyond 2006) consists of an amphitheatre, Moshate (presidential hospitality suite) and Commercial facilities<sup>3</sup>

The planning of Freedom Park Spiral pathway provides the material culture of modern states through commemorative pageantry and place-bound collective memories, bringing the abstract and the concrete together through pageantry providing a uniformity of experience. The commemorative procession, implied by the pathway, produces a symbolic landscape where patriotic emotions climax, through a fixed series of destinations, a symbolic web of ideological and spatial relationships. The lines projecting from the center of the site radiate outwards. The radial lines provide structured views of the landscape, in a didactic chronology while simultaneously imposing a centralized web of symbolic infrastructure thus reinforcing the centrality of the visitor in the site, which itself stands in metonymically for the nation.

A national memorial is intended to “facilitate a communal process of commemorating the pain and celebrating the victories of the past by preserving the memory of victims of conflicts and human rights abuses, caused by slavery, colonialism and racism and honoring the victims, heroes and heroines of the struggle against apartheid”.<sup>4</sup> The Museum is intended to use interactive “state of the art” exhibitions, which will recount, preserve and present South Africa’s pre-colonial, colonial apartheid and post-apartheid heritage. While the Garden of Remembrance will consist of a landscaped garden interspersed with monuments, statues and sculptures to acknowledge ordinary South Africans who contributed positively to the country’s development. An open air amphitheatre will host special national events and live performances. The Garden of Remembrance has been conceived as the “seat that carries the place of rest for fallen heroes”.

The route to *Isivivane* occurs along a spiral pathway - two big iron pots burning African incense – Imphepho – are to be located at the entrance to the spiral path. This is a landscaped stonework pathway, which would provide the ‘pilgrim’ with a radial view of the landscape and symbolic

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.freedompark.co.za/>

<sup>4</sup> Taken from Freedom Park Brochure, 2004

boulders. The narrative of the shrine is derived from indigenous belief systems, notions of nationhood as well as embodying ideas of ‘cleansing’ and ‘forgiveness’. *Isivivane* is an indigenous landscaped garden and constitutes a “national symbol of reparation, a symbol of healing and symbol of cleansing, a place for individual and group spiritual upliftment”. As such, the garden is intended to reflect the culture and living beliefs of “African forefathers and mothers, beliefs that are still true”. *Isivivane* is conceived as a ‘shrine’ that comprises a Lesaka (an inner circular structure where generations are buried) for the people that died represented by boulders, plants and soil that were brought from the nine provinces of the nation and various countries. Two additional boulders complete the circle – representing provincial and national government respectively. The Brochure to the Garden of Remembrance provides three interpretations: 1) paying homage to the hospitality of a place, 2) Burial and 3) Solidarity and oneness of purpose.

Furthermore, the collection of objects (plants and soil) within the museum precinct constructs a human continuity extending in time and space. The precinct contains representations of everything within the state territory and thus becomes a symbolic relation of power. While the museum precinct may embody the nation state, it also provides it with a place in the order of things. Thus the museum precinct is conceived as a symbol of national unity and identity and is placed in the context of the country’s development as a fixed totality<sup>5</sup>. As a structured representation of the national landscape, the Garden of Remembrance documents the origins of the state’s territorial political domain whilst simultaneously extending a symbolic web that ties other places of historical significance to Freedom Park. The architectural language of the Freedom Park pathway appeals to pre-colonial iconography - the Zimbabwe Ruins. This assertion of an indigenous landscape and architecture and the inscription of a teleological construction of the landscape –points to a re-inscription of an indigenous idiom, which contests the historicity and legitimacy of Afrikaner nationalist ascendancy, bolster an ideology of Africans’ right and bond to the land, while also shoring up ideological consensus from a historically marginalized population.

### **Nationalist Chronotopes**

In Cartographic Mexico: A History of State Fixations and Fugitive Landscapes; (Duke University Press, 2004), Raymond B. Craib analyses how the image of the Mexican landscape was a portrait

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 36

of features from a delimited part of the country. These topographical features had played a leading role in the topographical imaginary of what Mexico “looked like”. Such narratives of exploration and conquest were repeatedly circulated and replicated in various media of that period, as they were in fact metonyms for Mexico itself. The Spanish conquest thus influenced the way new arrivals experienced and viewed their surroundings who integrated the epic of Cortes’s expedition into the drama of their own passages... The physical space of Veracruz thus assumed form as a theatrical “stage space” (Craib, 2004, 40) in the use of a number of the most symbolically significant features in the nation’s official history, lending fixity to a particular national narrative that functions through the primary tropes for both imagining and entering the site. Cartography and particularly the acts of mapmaking were a means to establish political stability through foundational narratives which establish “geo-historical legitimacy”, state centralization, economic development and administrative control. This “panoptic ideal” (Craib,161) , which depends on a form of spatial order and an extensive knowledge of the territory, assumes that this exercise of state power will lend coherence to heterogeneous identities and terrains, characterized by competing histories and claims to rule.

Freedom Park thus acts as a “prosthetic site” and a “transferential site” (Landsberg, 2004). Alison Landsberg<sup>6</sup> argues that “prosthetic memories” are artificial memories generated for people who may not have lived through the event, (particularly the Holocaust). Landsberg argues that mass cultural representations, which are mediated through affect, might usefully complement cognition in the acquisition of knowledge about traumatic historical events. Thus sites are created in which people are invited to enter into experiential relationships to events through which they themselves did not live. Through such “transferential space”, people may gain access to a range of “procession, sensually immersed knowledge that would be difficult to acquire by purely cognitive means”.

On the other hand, Timothy Mitchell (1998), suggests that the panorama, cosmorama, diorama Europorama and uranorama all constituted an understanding that everything can be collected and arranged to represent progress and history. And those exhibitions, museums and other spectacles were not just reflections of this certainty, but the means of its production. They rendered history, progress, culture (and empire) in “objective” form, thus making claims to truth. Mitchell (1998) observes that the representation of “reality” constructs an observing gaze surrounded and set apart by the exhibition’s “careful order”; while the representation is set apart from the political reality it

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<sup>6</sup> Landsberg, Alison, Prosthetic Memories. The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Media; New York; Columbia University Press, 2004, pp 111-140

claims to show. The observer is set apart from what she or he observes creating two parallel distinctions, between the visitor and the exhibit and between the exhibit and what is expressed.

This objective representation is also partially present within the structured views of Freedom Park's surroundings. However, the seriality of traumatic experience, heroic struggle, cleansing and reconciliation within the national narrative, embodied in the spiral pathway experience and the museum narratives, are not only represented through an eclectic mixture of culturally loaded symbolic elements which lend the narrative further legitimacy. The route is also structured to cast the visitor in a performative role at the center of a theatrical historical experience in the present. Thus, Freedom Park also operates as a "transfrential site", an apparatus that is engaged with the work of incorporation of the individual and his or her transformation into a single and unified total experience. Within the ritualized spatial arrangement of Freedom Park, we see a convergence between the representation of information, knowledge and the interpretation of that knowledge, which is constructed as "a right of passage" for the individual, using affect and culturally coded symbols and spatially dispersed practices. Thus collapsing any distinctions between the identity of the victim- hero with that of visitor, the site and the nation-state.

Furthermore, the various axes radiating from the site and the structured views of the landscape enframe the landscape in a particular way in an attempt to incorporate diffuse memory sites into a single national site across time and space. Thus the Freedom Park is a metonym for all national memorials and in term the nation-state itself. However, Freedom Park is not merely a metonym nor an entirely artificial entity or experience, but might more adequately be described as a chronotope. I'm suggesting Bakhtin's use of the term "chronotope" to describe historically charged points in the geography of a community where time and space intersect and fuse<sup>7</sup>, which are nonetheless sharply delimited within Pretoria- itself a metonym, as opposed to the entire space of the nation.

This enframing of the symbolic terrain of Pretoria as a quintessentially South African landscape invites the pilgrim and the tourist to engage in a symbolic recuperation of the national symbolic landscape. Thus the reframing of the National cultural landscape at Freedom Park not only re-imagines the nation-state into existence, but also functioned as a means through which the nation-state can be more effectively imagined, managed, propagated, circulated and ultimately

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<sup>7</sup> Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 7



commoditized through the alienation state land on the urban periphery and its marketing to a global audience.

Arjun Appadurai argues that the increasing substitutability of whole periods and postures for one another, in the cultural styles of advanced capitalism, is tied to larger global forces. Appadurai suggests that pastiche and nostalgia are central modes of image production and reception in the peculiar chronicities of late capitalism. Quoting Frederic Jameson (1989), Appadurai describes this as “nostalgia for the present” as being the moment when people look back to a world they never lost, as one of the central ironies of the politics of global flows, especially in the arena of entertainment and leisure.<sup>8</sup> Jameson made the connection between the politics of nostalgia to the postmodern commodity sensibility (1983). Thus, the past is no longer a land to return to in a simple politics of memory, but has rather become a “synchronic warehouse” of cultural scenarios, to which recourse can be taken when needed. Jean Baudeillard and Jean Francois-Lyotard describe this as a world of signs “wholly unmoored from their social signifiers”. Furthermore, according to Appadurai, post-industrial cultural productions have entered a “postnostalgic phase” replaced by a “*Social Imaginaire*” - a constructed landscape of collective aspirations mediated through the complex prism of modern media – takes the place of nostalgia and is built around popular myths reworked and modernized but faithful to the atmospherics of the “original”.

In the case of postcolonial late capitalism, this nostalgia coalesces with a narratives of real counter-hegemonic political struggle and hegemonic narratives of the post-colonial nation-state producing both nostalgia for a lost past and a simultaneous erasure of the content of the struggle. ‘Nostalgia’ here is all the more powerful because such memories are simultaneously embodied albeit in a fragmentary and contradictory form in the lived experience of many South African.

Thus, consumption, leisure, edutainment become entangled acts of post-colonial resistance which are simultaneously hegemonic also promoting the recuperation of a recodified and totalized national history and the space of the post-colonial nation-state.

Through such practices, history and geography are territorialized and the spatial layout attempts to naturalize historical legitimacy of the state through their convergence on the map and

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<sup>8</sup> Arjun Appadurai, in “Modernity at Large: Global Dimensions of globalization”, Public Worlds Volume 1, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, London (p.31)

ultimately the site itself - fixing the land, and the memories and identities associated with it, as a stable cultural, political, historical and geographical object at critical points in the history of the nation.

The map has the power to create a particular reality, survey maps, plans, axial points and structured vistas, provide the basis for a politico-historical cadastre that would enable this geo-historical recalibration— thus contributing to the permanence, legibility and calibration and of citizenship, identity and rule. However, this nationalist imaginative geography (Said, 1989), points to the recuperation of the indigenous peoples of the region from an “anachronistic space”<sup>9</sup> and marries it to classical Liberal economic theory which asserts that the transformation of lands into commoditized space would promote productivity which would ensure that trans-national investors could secure the value of their individual investment. Whereas classical liberal theory asserts that the commoditization of space will also cultivate an ideal, ‘productive’, direct property-tax paying citizens who increase state revenues, within Freedom Park, the commoditization of memory practices commingles with the specter of direct foreign investment and the state thus displacing the role of citizenship into simulacra.

According to David Harvey<sup>10</sup>, Henri Lefebvre<sup>11</sup> and Michel Foucault, the understanding of “space as a stage” is tied to historical process of production which is linked to the social abstraction of commodity exchange and the political abstraction of the modern, territorial state. Thus the map/plan reflects the relationship between modes of representation and the material practices of power (Raymond Craib, 2004, p7). Furthermore cartographic routines provide a way of understanding a modality and methodology of rule- which produces material texts about space that can be used for administrative and regulatory purposes, but which also *produce* space as a text (through the inscription of lines, points, plots and place-names). State builders attempted to assume control over the space of the state through cartographic routines which facilitated capital’s control over land through techniques of representation. Freedom Park represents such attempts at “state fixation” at the symbolic level, producing a distinctive geography of capital and points to how memories attached to a particular geo-political landscape, are reconstituted through techniques of mapping, abstraction and naming and construct

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<sup>9</sup> Term coined by McIntock, Imperial Leather, chap.1. taken from Craib, 20004, pp 96

<sup>10</sup> Harvey, The Condition of Postmodernity, part 3

<sup>11</sup> Lefebvre, The Production of Space

encounters with a structured knowledge of the landscape and (dis)-embodies experiences of history.

That being said, I would like to avoid any facile dichotomies between history and memory, instrumental rationality and local histories, and local knowledge and official knowledge, or resistance and oppression. On the other hand, map/plan making and architecture and planning as their concrete expression, are power-laden spatial, social and political processes which reflect and produce the complexities of neo-liberal landscapes in (post)-apartheid South Africa and the spatial bifurcation which haunts modern day Pretoria. Therefore, resistance and power elides simple dichotomous constructions, but rather points to how previous narratives of resistance are transformed into a relation of complicity with the state and co-option by transnational capital, whilst simultaneously appealing to affect and traumatic memories, prosthetic and otherwise. The multiplicity of meanings and understanding are simultaneously ambiguous. This points to how embodies experiences of history through memory practices, ambiguity and historical-territorial multiplicity could be not only be a productive, but also a modality of power within which practices of regulation, evasion and co-option take place. Most importantly, the study points to a conception of space, not as passive, static or neutral, detached from meaning and experience, but rather as being actively produced by a host of actors/agents, and how space in and of itself can elicit different interpretations and actions based on historically and politically constructed meanings and identities.

### National Identity

Appadurai suggests that the consumer has been transformed through commodity flows into a sign, both in Baudrillard's sense of a simulacrum that only "asymptomatically approaches the form of a real social agent", and in the sense of a mask for the real seat of agency, which is not the consumer but the producer and the many forces that constitute production. Global advertising is the key technology for the worldwide dissemination of a wide range of creative and culturally coded ideas of "consumer agency". These images of agency are increasingly distortions of a world of merchandising so subtle that the consumer is consistently helped to believe that he or she is an actor, "where in fact he or she is at best a chooser".

Furthermore, whereas the globalization of culture is not the same as its homogenization, globalization nonetheless involves the use of a variety of instruments of homogenization

including language hegemonies and museum narratives and monuments, that are absorbed into local political and cultural economies, only to be repatriated as heterogeneous dialogues of national sovereignty, free enterprise (and fundamentalism) in which the state plays an increasingly delicate role. The state has become the arbitrageur of this “*repatriation of difference*” (in the form of goods, signs, slogans and styles). But this repatriation or export of the designs and commodities of difference continuously exacerbates the internal politics of majoritarianism and homogenization, which is most frequently played out in debates over heritage. (Appadurai, 42)

The central feature of global culture is the politics of the mutual effort of sameness and difference to cannibalize one another and thereby proclaim their successful hijacking of the twin Enlightenment ideas of the triumphantly universal and the resiliently particular. This mutual “cannibalization” might show itself through violence (with or without state support) but conversely in the expansion of many individual horizons of hope and fantasy (Appadurai, 50) Both sides of the coin of global cultural process today are products of the infinitely varied mutual contest of sameness and difference on a stage characterized by radical disjunctions between different sorts of global flows and the uncertain landscapes created in and through these disjunctions. (43) Freedom Park is merely a point within this uncertain landscape.

### Conclusion

While the introduction of Freedom Park as a “one-stop heritage precinct”<sup>12</sup> and its confrontational positioning in relation to the Voortrekker Monument and Pretoria constitute the cultural and historic landscape of nation’s capital, it also introduces a new vector in this field of symbolic power whilst making counterclaims to Afrikaners’ telluric bond with the earth, belonging and ownership. Nation building practices are thus built into a larger context of property and the land claims at the symbolic level. As an imaginary that is situated at the intersection of a particular kind of territorial nativism and the perceived threat of the “deterritorializing dynamic of neoliberal capitalist expansion”, South African nationalism is part of a wider dynamic between processes of “nation-building,” global restructuring and liberalization. This highlights the dialectical relationship between state post-colonial discourses and processes of global restructuring and

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<sup>12</sup> [http://www.southafrica.info/pls/procs/iac.page\\_3/18/2005](http://www.southafrica.info/pls/procs/iac.page_3/18/2005)

how nativist representations of the “nation” increasingly invoke “tradition” to legitimize the exercise of power through the erasure of memory, and the retooling of identity.

Antonio Gramsci's ideas of hegemony are a crucial complement to understanding this particular regime of governmentality, particularly through the emphasis on culture as a critical terrain of political struggle. This particular theme encourages analytical attention to the spatiality of power relations and the politics of positioning and location. Gramsci elaborated fragments of an analytic of power that educates consent, cultivates conduct and orchestrates as it compels fusing force and power. Gramsci recognizes the power of culture - its production of subjects, identities and interests, its mobilization of struggle and legitimating of subordination and its role as a medium and ground for contesting social and political inequalities. Freedom Park demonstrates how hegemonic processes fetishize culture, using it to discipline consent, impose norms, discriminate and exclude through the politics of culture.

Hegemony hinges on discursive production, leading subjects to consent by identifying particular interests with a general, more universalizing one. As a spatialization of hegemonic formations of rule, Freedom Park attempts to both orchestrate and compel consent by shaping the cultural practices, educating the consent of subjects whose conduct contributes to the conditions of their own subordination to the will of the state. However, precisely because hegemony is processual, contingent and contested, it can never be total or complete, but rather requires constant struggle. Therefore, while Freedom Park simultaneously constructs an image of an idealized multiculturalism under the Rubicon of the “African Renaissance”, as a simulated environment, it not only creates a particular aesthetic experience but also a very abstract idea of the state and “human rights”, which elides narratives of social justice within a spatially fragmented city and an economically polarized society, whilst simultaneously being the embodiment of some of the workings of “disorganized capitalism” and culturally coded memory practices.

**BRESLAUER CONFERENCE 2006: WORKING PAPER - DRAFT: 12- page outline**