

Research Essays

A Forensic Approach to Constructing a Biography of Voortrekker Road, Bellville.

- Brent Abrahams



Figure 1: N. M. Du Plessis, *Die Tygerberg: Die Verhaal van die Tygerbergheuwels en die stedelike gebiede Parow, Bellville en Durbanville*. Kaapstad: Tafelberg, 1998, pp. 79.

The taxi drive from Kuils River to Bellville Station rarely ceases to intrigue and bewilder me, and neither does the drive from the station to the Bellville Public Swimming Pools—or Bellville Bads, as I have always called it—where I would walk up Lincoln Street to visit a friend living in Boston. It is not, however, the congested morning traffic through Van Riebeeck and Strand Road, but rather, the peculiarity of Voortrekker Road that imbues me with these impressions. Whether from within or without the minibus taxi, the journey through Voortrekker Road, Bellville, engages my senses. What is this unique aesthetic Voortrekker Road emits—evoking visions of past ambitions and present complacency, growth and

decline, banality and vigour, alike—and from where does this reaction stem, whether on wheels or walking through this diverse road? What is this Voortrekker Road about which I so readily conjure dichotomies? As a means to do justice to this unique road, which is Voortrekker, I shall approach this enquiry from an equally unique stance, invoking Thomas Keenan and Eyal Weizman's work on Forensics, and Allen Carlson's ideas on environmental aesthetics to capture Voortrekker Road's wonder in its entirety. What do I mean when I ascribe an aesthetic to Voortrekker Road? Carlson's definition on aesthetics is useful to answer this question. He states, “[a]esthetics is the area of philosophy that concerns our appreciation of things as they affect our senses, and especially as they affect them in a pleasing way”.¹ Often solely associated with art, Carlson asserts that aesthetic appreciation can refer to anything from nature to the “bustling morning market place, [and] the view from the road”. This, Carlson calls environmental aesthetics, which is integral to my forensic approach to constructing a biography of Voortrekker Road, and Bellville to a larger extent.² Note that this understanding of aesthetics does not conflict with Keenan and Weizman's description as “the judgment of the senses”, as they agree upon one's senses being stimulated.³

Relaying the procedures that involved the identification of Josef Mengele's remains, Keenan and Weizman refers to a term coined by Clyde Snow, *osteobiography*, which denotes “the biography of bones. The bones, no longer the living human but not simply an

¹ Allen Carlson, *Aesthetics and the Environment: The Appreciation of Nature, Art and Architecture*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000, p. xvii.

² *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

³ Thomas Keenan and Eyal Weizman, *Mengele's Skull: The Advent of a Forensic Aesthetic*. Portikus: Sternberg Press, 2012, pp. 24.

object, bear the imprint of a lived life".⁴ In other words, bones bear the remnants of life's rigours: Keenan and Weizman assert that we are able, through scrutiny, to discern the "entire history of life—a sequence of illness, incidents, and accidents, along with conditions of nutrition, labo[u]r, and habit—that is fossilized into the morphology and texture of bones".⁵

Therefore, through scrutiny of the bones we are able to create a biography of the deceased individual. With this idea borne in mind, it is my belief that through a scrutiny of certain buildings, objects and places which I consider emblematic of Voortrekker Road, we are able to generate a history of Voortrekker Road's 'life' and understand my apparently subjective sensory impressions when travelling through the road.⁶ These emblems or symbols of Voortrekker Road's history, I assert, are, namely the 'Twaalf Myl' milestone, the Sunbel building, the Civic Centre and the Bellville Police Department. They have always intrigued me.

Just as the expert speaks for and interprets the imprints left behind on the human remains, I (as an unofficial expert) with the assistance of the extensive archive on Bellville's history—municipal documents, newspaper clippings and photographs—will speak on behalf of these symbols and validate them as signs of the past and present life of Bellville and Voortrekker Road. Keenan and Weizman note the importance of "documents, photographs, and medical records" in building a biography of the individual through

⁴*Ibid*, pp. 18

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 19

⁶ The subjective is significant in the interpretation of bones because—excuse the generic example—just as photographs and paintings, people, whether the expert or the layman, often attribute varying meaning and significance to the same object.

scrutiny of his/her remains.⁷ Hence my use of the archive alongside the visual presentation of the buildings and objects on Voortrekker Road. This biography will, however, not be constructed within the parameters of chronology. Instead I will examine four locations individually, despite the era of their particular emergence.

In the Masterson collection on the Bellville Municipality, 1970, a summary of the events and statistics of Bellville's growth during the 1960s is conveyed. In Afrikaans, the scribe writes a romanticised introduction to Bellville's development, stating that Bellville is "*die voordeur van die Kaap/the front door to the Cape*" and that its "*strategiese ligging is ongeewenaard en het baie bygedra tot die dorp se snelle ontwikkeling op alle gebiede/ its strategic location is unmatched and has contributed to the town's speedy development in all areas*".⁸ Development and transformation is therefore incredibly significant in the discourse on the history of Bellville.

With this description of Bellville in mind, I will now commence my investigation of the symbols of Voortrekker Road and identify what they tell us about the 'life history' of the road and the broader history of Bellville, starting with the 'Twaalf Myl' milestone.

In the rare event that I find myself walking from Bellville station to Bellville Public Library, the Voortrekker and Durban Road intersection bears an interesting imprint, a piece of history

⁷ Thomas Keenan and Eyal Weizman, *Mengele's Skull: The Advent of a Forensic Aesthetic*. Portikus: Sternberg Press, 2012, pp. 18.

⁸ Bel 37, Bellville Munisipaliteit: Algemene Statistiek 1970s, The Masterson Collection, Special Collections, Bellville Library, pp. 1.

surrounded by the traffic lights, a bench and plants, where the 'Twaalf Myl' milestone stands erect beside a rusted oil street lamp.

The 'Twaalf Myl' Milestone or the 'Twaalfde Mylpaal'



Figure 2: Brent Abrahams. "The small stone to the right of the lamppost is easy to miss". 30 May 2016

Why, however, are these obsolete objects situated at this intersection, barely noticeable amid the dominating buildings, traffic, road signs and pedestrians? Unavoidably, we find ourselves engaged in a look into the history of Bellville.

According to *Bellville: Wordingsjare van 'n Stad – Growth of a City*, the milestone "marked the twelfth mile from Cape Town on the Maitland Road, as the Cape road was called by the middle of the 19th century".⁹ 'Twaalf Myl' was also the name for the small settlement the stone was located in, which during this period was

⁹ C. J. Scheepers Strydom, *Bellville: Wordingsjare van 'n Stad – Growth of a City*. Bellville: Stadsraad van Bellville, 1981, pp. 11.

yet to receive an official name. Although the 'Twaalf Myl' was only established, it is believed, in 1843, the outspan, Hardekraaltjie, which served as a place of rest and refreshment for those travelling to and from Cape Town, had been in existence for longer than a century at the time. Hardekraaltjie's reputation as a resting place for wagons is greatly and romantically conveyed in the municipal documents that relay the history of Bellville. Bellville's history is, therefore, entangled within the history of Hardekraaltjie's existence as an outspan, and the name 'Twaalf Myl' preceded that of 'Bellville'.

Before 'Twaalf Myl', the unofficial name for the small village, was named Bellville, by 1859 it was afforded the name D'Urban Road.



Figure 3: *Die Burger*, 19 October 1987.
(Masterson Collection)

However, as suggested in a proclamation on 18 November 1861 by Richard Southey, Acting Colonial Secretary, the village on Maitland Road would be named Bellville, in honour of Charles Bell, Surveyor-General of the Cape from 1848-1872.¹⁰ An investigation into the significance of the 'Twaalf Myl' milestone, therefore, evokes discussion on the history of Bellville

before it was the immense and expanding city it is today.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

The milestone is thus indexical of Bellville's past; an imprint of the past life of Bellville and Voortrekker Road. Speaking of Voortrekker Road, what does the milestone tell us of its 'life history'? Interestingly, throughout the prior analysis of the milestone and the history of Bellville, I referred to the milestone being located on Maitland Road. According to an article in *Die Burger*, 19 October 1984, Maitland Road was renamed to Voortrekker Road in 1938 in commemoration of the ox-wagon movement through the Road in its early life.¹¹



Figure 4: C. J. Scheepers Strydom, Bellville: Wordingsjare van 'n Stad - Growth of a City. Bellville: Stadsraad van Bellville, 1981, p. 11

Once again, we are confronted with the history of Bellville as a significant outspan, but also the origins and history of Voortrekker Road. Importantly, when evaluating the significance of Voortrekker Road, we can discern that it still remains a significant road today, as it was in the 19th century. This alludes to successful city planning. Despite vast development throughout the 20th century, Voortrekker Road has maintained its significance. Whereas, in the past it served as a road to and from Cape Town, and presently this has not changed, however for many people Voortrekker Road is the destination. It possesses within it economic opportunities, learning institutions, shopping centres and stores.

¹¹ *Die Burger*, 16 October 1984, Bel 40, The Masterson Collection, Special Collections, Bellville Library.

Although Voortrekker Road has not lost its importance, the 'Twaalf Myl' milestone has. This is apparent by its appearance today. The Roman letters denoting the number twelve are covered by leaflets advertising abortion.

Bellville has therefore changed profoundly since the era of ox-wagons and outspan. By no means am I invoking any discussion on morality, but perhaps the leaflets that cover the milestone's facade represents a decline of Voortrekker Road. A monument, the 'Twaalf Myl' milestone, of such significance in the history of Bellville's and Voortrekker Road's existence, stands defiled at the corner of the intersection, yet no attempt to restore it to its former state has been made. No, this minute detail on the corner of the Voortrekker-Durban Road intersection is not the sole cause of my impressions of bemusement towards Voortrekker Road, but perhaps it represents a broader problem at hand, a problem that conjures the dichotomies of the archaic clashing with the modern; a dichotomy which is seen throughout Voortrekker Road, Bellville—dichotomies which create an interesting environmental aesthetic. The state in which the milestone is in today therefore portrays a picture of Voortrekker Road's life at the present moment.

The significance of the 'Twaalf Myl' milestone is also undermined by the reality of being dwarfed by the buildings and objects around it—towering over and enveloping it—and the overwhelming traffic that occurs at the Voortrekker-Durban Road intersection:

Waar dié historiese twaalfmyklip in die negentiende eeu 'n baken was dat die uitspanplek vir togryers langs die pad tussen Kaapstad en Stellenbosch aangedui het, word die klip vandag verdwerg deur die groot sakesentrums langs Voortrekkerweg.¹² (In the nineteenth century, the historical twelve mile stone, along the roadside became a beacon for recreation for the transport riders on the road between Cape Town and Stellenbosch. Sadly, today this stone is dwarfed by the big business centres along Voortrekker Road.)

The buildings around the milestone are a testament to the growth and development of Bellville and Voortrekker Road. One can only imagine the extent to which the milestone's significance as a historical monument has diminished, due to being overshadowed by development, since the quote was expressed in *Die Burger* in 1984. Bellville and Voortrekker Road have indeed transformed themselves since their inception.



Figure 5: "Milestone". 30 May 2016.

¹² *Die Burger*, 19 Oktober 1987, Bel 43, The Masterson Collection, Special Collections, Bellville Library.

Therefore, the 'Twaalf Myl' milestone, an emblem of Voortrekker and Bellville's life, tells us of its beginnings and its progression—from an 'outspan' to a municipality, from Twaalf Myl to D'Urban Road to Bellville, and from Maitland Road to Voortrekker Road.

Although the milestone's significance has shrunk immensely, its mere presence at the intersection creates an aesthetic which briefly provokes an enquiry— 'What is this?'—amid the bustle and noise of Voortrekker and Durban Road. Interestingly, to emphasize its loss of significance, the milestone resembles a cemetery headstone, as if made in remembrance of an era forever lost.

Scrutiny of the milestone reveals a plethora of information on the history of the life and transformation of Bellville and Voortrekker Road. Whereas the 'Twaalf Myl' milestone educates us on the change since 19th century, an immense amount of transformation would occur in the 20th century. The abortion advertisements are therefore also a symbol of this change; a sign of the values of the past being undermined by that of the present. Another such symbol in the transformation and progression in the life of Voortrekker Road is the Sunbel building.

The Sunbel building



Figure 6 "Sunbel Building". 30 May 2016.

In the booklet, *Bellville: Feesjaar – 1960/Festival Year – 1960*, City Engineer, M. T. De Waal expresses his ambitions for the municipality of Bellville. He relays in Afrikaans:

As die regte balans behou word tussen die woonbuurtes, die ontwikkeling van die sake- en nywerheidslewe, en gesorg word vir die geestelike en fisiese ontspanning van die inwooners, is die grondslag verseker van 'n gelukkige gemeenskap.¹³

(If the correct balance is maintained between the neighbourhoods, the development of the business and industrial life, and the spiritual and physical relaxation of the inhabitants are cared for, the basis for a happy community is ensured.)

My analysis on the 'Twaalf Myl' milestone alluded to the economic development prevalent in Bellville, but particularly in Voortrekker Road. I will now address De Waal's comments on the '*ontwikkeling van die sake- en nywerheidslewe*' to depict how the Sunbel

¹³*Burgemeestersverslae 1948 to 1960. 'Bellville: Feesjaar – 1960/ Festival Year – 1960', Bel 35, The Masterson Collection, Special Collections, Bellville Library, p. 23.*

building is representative of the economic and business life of Voortrekker Road. Despite its late emergence in Voortrekker Road's history—opening to occupants in January 1985—Sunbel's twelve-storied, octagon-shaped aspect is an oddity and therefore, a distinct and unusual symbol of Voortrekker Road's life throughout the years.¹⁴

The Sunbel building represents the city-planners' ambitions for Voortrekker Road, that is, a building offering more space to conduct daily business and economic pursuits. The Sunbel building could justifiably grab one's attention, as towering over you—motorist and pedestrians alike—making it particularly hard to overlook. The Sunbel building is an emblem of economic progression which began decades earlier. 'Economic progress' is a recurring theme in the 1950s and 1960s newspaper articles, wherein they celebrate plans to establish new buildings to maintain Voortrekker's economic growth. A *Sunday Times* article titled "Booming Bellville will get R1m Building" asserts that the "business progress of Bellville is regarded as symbolic of the economic progress of the Afrikaner generally".¹⁵ Another article from 1967 also speaks of a R1m 13-storey building, with a graphic of the intended design.¹⁶ Despite countless travels through Voortrekker Road, Bellville, I have not noticed these buildings.

Whether they came into being or not, that I am not able to easily identify these ambitious buildings, says something about Sunbel's existence.

¹⁴ *Die Burger*, 19 September 1984, Bel 40, The Masterson Collection, Special Collections, Bellville Library.

¹⁵ *Sunday Times*, 24 May 1964, Bel 13, The Masterson Collection, Special Collections, Bellville Library, p. 6. Afrikaner, a racially charged term, will be encountered and better accounted for in my analysis of Bellville's Civic Centre.

¹⁶ *Cape Times*, 18 May 1967, Bel 13, The Masterson Collection, Special Collections, Bellville Library.

It makes Sunbel a success story in the pursuit of economic progress in Bellville—Sunbel is therefore a symbol of the ambitions for Bellville and Voortrekker Road. The Sunbel building and the pursuit of building more buildings of its immense nature also encourages us to engage in an important reality: that buildings of Sunbel's ilk are the extreme on the spectrum of the manifestations of economic progress.

Today, economic pursuits in Voortrekker Road are seen on a much smaller scale, and are much less formal. These are apparent in the diverse shops and businesses in Voortrekker Road, Bellville; from R5 stores to internet cafes, barber shops and salons, fast-food stores and market stalls. This contrast makes for an interesting aesthetic and thus validates my impressions. An aesthetic of vast and various colours, designs, modern and archaic, and buildings of diverse shapes, large and small.

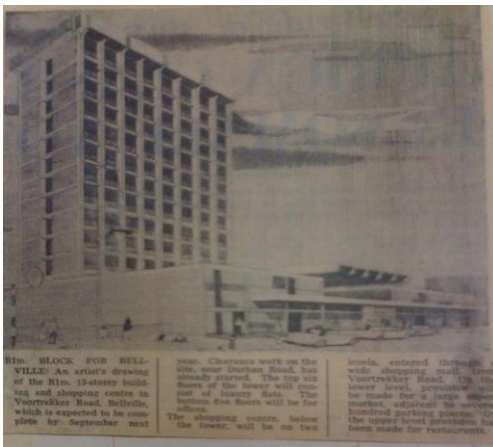


Figure 7: Cape Times, 1967, Bel 13, The Masterson Collection, Special Collections, Bellville Library.

The Sunbel Building therefore provokes questions around the economic growth of Voortrekker Road throughout its life, and the manifestations of this growth, but also invokes themes of racial and class dynamics. N. M. Du Plessis's book, *Die Tygerberg*, published in 1998, determines the percentage of professional and semi-professional businesses in Bellville.¹⁷ He presents a percentage for fourteen sub-sections in Bellville. However, to avoid cluttering this essay with too many

¹⁷ N. M. Du Plessis, *Die Tygerberg: Die verhaal van die Tygerbergheuwels en die stedelike gebiede Parow, Bellville en Durbanville*. Kaapstad: Tafelberg, 1998, pp. 80.

names and numbers, I have calculated the average percentage of professional and semi-professional businesses for the entire area: 40,4 percent.¹⁸ This statistic from 1998 gives us an idea of the economic development throughout Bellville. The Sunbel building, being the most recently erected of the emblems of Voortrekker Road I focus on, has not changed in appearance, although the buildings around it has.

Bellville Civic Centre

Here it is appropriate to review an excerpt from M. T. De Waal's sentiments in the booklet *Bellville: Feesjaar – 1960/Festival Year – 1960*. He relays in Afrikaans:

*As die regte balans behou word tussen die woonbuurtes... en gesorg word vir die geestelike en fisiese ontspanning van die inwoners, is die grondslag verseker van 'n gelukkige gemeenskap. (If the correct balance is maintained between the neighbourhoods... and the spiritual and physical relaxation of the inhabitants are cared for, the basis for a happy community is ensured).*¹⁹

The Civic Centre, the cultural hub of Bellville and located on Voortrekker Road, ushered in an added facet of the growth and



the fulfilment of ambitions—relayed by De Waal—of the municipality when it was finally complete in 1957 and opened to the public on June 14th. As mentioned by various articles,

Figure 8: "Bellville Civic Centre". 30 May 2016.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 80.

¹⁹ *Burgemeestersverslae 1948 to 1960*. 'Bellville: Feesjaar – 1960/ Festival Year – 1960, Bel 35, The Masterson Collection, Special Collections, p. 23.

the Civic Centre symbolised the continued growth of Bellville. Amid the widespread economic development—as represented by the Sunbel building—the Civic Centre was unique in that it held a municipal theatre, the first of its kind in the Union. Furthermore, it boasted a “banqueting hall, dance hall, stage, modern council chamber... a Mayor’s parlour” and provided accommodation for the municipal staff.²⁰ An article in the *Cape Argus*, 1957, validates the above description whilst opening an interesting avenue. The article describes Bellville as the “cultural home of the Afrikaner in the Western Cape [and the] focal point of these aspirations is its beautiful new civic centre”.²¹

Indeed, the Civic Centre is the cultural heart of Bellville. However, let us explore the notion of the “home of the Afrikaner”. By virtue of the sentiments expressed above, my attention is drawn to the racial demographics of Bellville at the time the Civic Centre was completed. Amid the racial tensions garnered by apartheid and the Group Areas Act (GAA)—and it is essential to note that the GAA only came into fruition in Bellville in 1959 — Bellville was fundamentally comprised of a white majority. The municipal documents convey the population for 1960 as follows: White, 17,509; Coloured, 9,841; Bantu, 472; Asiatics, 102.²² Bellville was therefore still relatively small, but, when compared to the population statistics of 1952, the amount of growth it experienced is very noticeable.²³ These statistics do, however, convey a decline in the Bantu population, likely due to the GAA.

²⁰ *Cape Argus*, 14 June 1957, Bel 12, The Masterson Collection, Special Collections, Bellville Library, p. 96.

²¹ *Cape Argus*, 31 October 1957, Bel 12, The Masterson Collection, Special Collections, Bellville Library, p. 112.

²² Bel 37, Bellville Munisipaliteit: Algemene Statistic 1970s, The Masterson Collection, Special Collections, Bellville Library.

²³ White: 9,200; Coloured: 5,600; Bantu: 2,500; Asiatics: 100.

The Coloured community, according to the 1959 – 1960 minutes of Mayor W. F. van Riet, could flourish in Bellville as Bellville-South was proclaimed a Coloured Area.²⁴ The issue of racial dynamics in relation to the Civic Centre is further amplified in an article in the *Cape Times* on 22 May 1957. Addressing the preparations for the coming launch of the Civic Centre, the article asserts the reality of racial segregation: "There will be full segregation of races, with separate doorways, lift and stairways".²⁵

Of course, racial segregation is not unique to Bellville, as this was an issue in the whole of South Africa at the time, but a look at the Civic Centre does tell us how it impacted Bellville in its cultural life, quite outside of the overwhelming economic growth around it. The Civic Centre therefore conjures up the racial realities present in Bellville and Voortrekker Road in the 20th century. Although its physical aspect does not convey this, the archive does, and as conveyed by Keenan and Weizman's work on Forensics, the archive is an integral aspect of constructing an osteobiography, or in my case, a biography of Voortrekker Road.

Furthermore, the Civic Centre's physical presentation unavoidably impacts the environmental aesthetic I perceive. Its unique clock tower is mesmerising along the drag of Voortrekker Road with its disorderly traffic. In a 1982 article in the Supplement to *The Argus*, a photograph of the Civic Centre and its clock tower is captioned as "Bellville's modern clock tower and civic centre are symbolic of the young city's progressive outlook".²⁶

²⁴ Municipality of Bellville: Minute of His Worship the Mayor Councilor W. F. van Riet, Year 1950 – 1960, Bel 19, The Masterson Collection, Special Collections, Bellville Library.

²⁵ *Cape Times*, 22 May 1957, Bel 12, The Masterson Collection, Special Collections, Bellville Library, p. 93.

²⁶ Supplement to *The Argus*, 6 September 1982. Bel 39, The Masterson Collection, Special Collections, Bellville Library, pp. 1.

Today, however, the clock stands still. This not only signifies its loss of purpose, but also, I believe, its loss of significance in the era we live. In the past, it symbolised Bellville's development. Perhaps the extent of development has rendered the clock tower obsolete.

Furthermore, the word 'Theatre' on the Civic Centre's front has not only lost the second 't' but the first 'e' hangs at a slant. Once more, this alludes to a reduced importance to the inhabitants of Bellville. Despite this, as a symbol of the life of Bellville and Voortrekker Road, and with the help of the archive to substantiate my claims, it becomes apparent that the Civic Centre evokes a discourse on apartheid and the growth of Voortrekker Road as not merely an economic and business sector during these times.



Figure 9: Brent Abrahams, "The missing 'T' and the hanging 'E' signifies a diminished pride in Bellville's Civic Centre", 30 May 2016.



Figure 10: Bel 37, Foto's van Stadswording 07/09/1979, Special Collections, Bellville Library. The celebration of Bellville being proclaimed a city. This photograph conveys the clock tower's significance in the past.

Bellville Police Station

Finally, we are brought to Bellville Police Station, a building which now stands behind the greenery of trees, and whose inception is as equally mysterious as its appearance, for it is known to few that



Figure 9: Brent Abrahams, "Façade of Bellville Police Station". 30 May 2016.

this building, now a Police Station, was once the first official school for Bellville's White population. The history of the Bellville Police Station derives from two separate initiatives to establish

a flourishing public school in 1898.²⁷ These respective initiatives—informal schools—soon engaged in discussions to establish an official public school. The result was the development of three classrooms.

The façade of the building, as seen on the photographs, bears the inscription 'AD 1912', signifying the construction of more classrooms, and thus, the expansion of the school. Scheepers Strydom cites: "*In 1912 het dit weer nodig geword om klaskamers aan te bou*/In 1912 it became necessary again to build classrooms."²⁸ Today these classrooms are indexical of Bellville Police Station, located on Voortrekker Road, Bellville. The building's architectural design does not only signify its place in Bellville's history, but the inscription points to a particular history—the history of education in Bellville and Voortrekker Road.

²⁷ C. J. Scheepers Strydom, *Bellville: Wordingsjare van 'n Stad – Growth of a City*. Bellville: Stadsraad van Bellville, 1981, p. 69.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 72.



Figure 10: C. J. Scheepers Strydom, Bellville: Wordingsjare van 'n Stad – Growth of a City. Bellville: Stadsraad van Bellville, 1981, p. 69.

What was once a school, is now a police department—this is truly a testament to Bellville and Voortrekker Road's transformation. Since the very first initiative to make public schooling an added element of Bellville's development, public schooling has become widespread. Municipal statistics of the 1970s convey the presence of six primary schools and three high schools for the White population - they also state the existence of three primary schools for non-whites and one high school.²⁹

Therefore, an analysis of Bellville Police Station brings about the life history of Bellville and Voortrekker Road, where Voortrekker Road, in the late-19th to the mid-20th century, was thus an emblem of education in Bellville. This building adds to the environmental aesthetic which had earlier been established. The architectural design contrasts with many of its surrounding buildings, once more evoking the dichotomies of the old and the new.

These dichotomies are perhaps also relevant in the photograph above and the one below. The older photograph—the one

²⁹Bel 37, Bellville Munisipaliteit: Algemene Statistiek 1970s, The Masterson Collection, Special Collections, Bellville Library.

above—exudes an overtness which emphasizes its importance within the community, and the importance of education. The present-day photograph is peculiar in that at first glance there is little indication that it is a police station. The photograph below depicts a hidden and mysterious aspect induced by the trees, and although admirable in a building-dominated road, that the police station is not evident could suggest that trees are unkempt. It is therefore quite contradictory that in an area and road, Bellville's Voortrekker, renowned for its crime, the police station is obscured.

Therefore, a focus on Bellville Police Station as an emblem of Voortrekker Road's life, conjures questions of community values, then and now. Education, important to the Bellville community in the past, was emphasised by the building's eminence. The police



Figure 11: Bellville Police Station.

station, although bearing the school's character, is lost among the surrounding trees and buildings. This loss of eminence happens to coincide with the road's crime problem. This is,

however, not a judgment on the police's work and efforts to curtail crime in the area, in fact, according to the *TygerBurger*, earlier this year, the Bellville police held a meeting with local business authorities to discuss ways in which to prevent crime and improve safety in the area.³⁰ An analysis of this emblem representative of the life of Voortrekker Road, Bellville, is therefore a look into the transformation of education and crime in the area.

³⁰ *TygerBurger*, 20 January 2016, Town and Cities, Bellville, Bellville Library, pp. 13.

Therefore, through analysis of the buildings and objects which I believe are emblematic of Voortrekker Road, I am able to construct its biography. Not only this, but through scrutiny of these signs in pursuit of a biography, I have come to better understand Voortrekker Road's environmental aesthetic. In the process, I have come to grasp my own impressions, amazement and misgivings with regard to the Road, as a daily commuter. The milestone, once important to travellers, has become a surface to advertise abortion.

As Voortrekker Road has developed, the milestone has lost its function, not only to indicate the location, but also as a means to commemorate the past. The Bellville Police Station, similarly signifies Bellville's and Voortrekker Road's past life. The building was once the location of a school, and thus, also bears the remnants of it—seen in its architectural design and its inscription. Though it points to Bellville's history of education, in its current life, it tells of law and crime.

The milestone and the police station are clearly emblems of Voortrekker's earlier life that also evoke thoughts on its contemporary existence. The Sunbel building and the Civic Centre represent a more modern perspective on Voortrekker's life and are thus also symbols of the past's transformation. These two emblems of expansion tell us of Voortrekker Road, Bellville's, economic and cultural life—a life carried out during the racial tensions derived from apartheid. Although the continued transformation had an undiscernible effect on the appearance of Sunbel, the Civic Centre's clock tower tells of a different life. Additionally, the letters denoting the Civic Centre's 'Theatre' have come loose. The Civic Centre has perhaps lost its significance, and

the pride once shown in it by the community seems to have diminished.

Voortrekker Road, or Maitland Road as it was known in the 19th century, progressed from a dirt road through the outspan, to a road at the economic and cultural centre of Bellville—Bellville, which, as of a 2011 census, hosts a population of 44 209 people.³¹ In the past, Voortrekker Road and Bellville were home to a white majority, which it still is today, according to the census. However, growth and transformation can be observed by the increase of non-whites across the racial range. These realities emerge through an analysis of the symbols I emphasize — through visual perception and the archive which validates what I see. These buildings, which I assert are emblems of Voortrekker Road, Bellville, assist me in constructing a biography of Voortrekker Road and Bellville.

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³¹ City of Cape Town – 2011 Census Suburb Bellville July 2013.

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