

Mediating Contemporary Cultures

Essays on Some South African Magazines,
Malls and Sites of Themed Leisure

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Essays on Some South African Magazines, Malls and Sites of Themed Leisure

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis, apart from the quotations acknowledged within it, is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Natal. It has not been submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other university.



Sally-Ann Murray

.....^{31st}..... day of July 1998.



ABSTRACT

In this Thesis, from the disciplinary vantage point of English Studies, I explore some of the complex meanings that may be attributed to several forms and practices of South African consumer culture: magazines, malls and themed leisure. While these contemporary cultural 'texts' are often ephemeral, and people's attachments to them fractured, transient or at least ambivalent rather than unproblematic, my argument takes issue with the pessimism that informs much local and international criticism of consumer culture. My Thesis turns to concepts of affect, image, sign and discourse which have become features of current English Studies in order to generate readings of commercial culture more nuanced than the 'hard analyses' favoured by dominant practitioners of 'radical' South African cultural studies. At the same time, though, my analyses have learnt through disparate forms of local cultural study the necessity of grounding textuality in the structures of political economy.

By means of manageable yet conceptually-suggestive South African instances, I consider how commodities and commodified experiences – generated in the first instance by the vested interests of Capital and related ideologies – may nevertheless be experienced by people in a plethora of ways not directly tied to the commercially-expedient construct of the 'target audience'. This experiential process entails a rampant volatility typical of a mass-mediated lexicon which challenges boundaries between high and low, formal and unofficial, propriety and the improper. While advertising and promotion, for instance, function as corporate attempts to contain proliferating signifiers and to secure a preferred, 'authorised' meaning for cultural goods or services, it is also the case that consumers themselves, perhaps creatively and certainly in clandestine ways that escape the supposed authorities of either market researcher or academic intelligence, author meanings that rework the limitations of what still tends to be construed within the university as a culture industry at once banal and insidious. The meanings of the contemporary cultures with which I deal, then, are highly mediated and many-layered, rather than constituting the mere surface announcement often imagined by scholars of both literary culture and of media- and cultural studies.

The contexts of my Thesis are particular: it was completed in 1998, and has been produced from a university in KwaZulu-Natal by an academic formally trained in English

Studies. In some respects, then, the interpretations I offer are narrow: geographically, historically and disciplinarily focussed. Yet in working on South African examples of commoditised forms and practices that derive from metropolitan vectors and have convoluted international genealogies, I have also sought to theorise the shifting interrelations of regional and national, local and global, discipline-specific and interdisciplinary knowledge. Drawing widely on studies into consumer relations – and at apposite points identifying conceptual connections and differences between ‘foreign’ figures like Michel de Certeau and influential South African thinkers such as Njabulo S. Ndebele – I suggest that for all its shortcomings consumerism needs to be understood as active process rather than as passive effect. My argument implies that such a rethinking of the conventional binaries of production and consumption is appropriate in a South Africa which is gradually giving substance to a democratic social order. Even within a politics premised on the individual, forms of consumption such as magazine reading and shopping need not necessarily be scorned as the selfish, even hedonistic pursuits caricatured by ideological purists: the Thesis seeks to demonstrate that people are at once citizens and consumers, individuals searching after distinctive identity and style as well as desirous of achieving a variety of community-inflected bonds.

Overall, the commercial culture examined in the Thesis is represented not as inevitably marred by cultural deficiency and degraded value – despite the dissatisfactions, irritations and deferred pleasures which for many of us form at least one facet of consumption – but as an everyday spectacle which is available for symbolic interpretation and aesthetic investment. This investment may be emotional as well as cognitive, sensuous as well as critical, mundane as well as exceptional, since individuals come to commodity culture with a range of longings, dreams, fears and sedimented allegiances. As my readings demonstrate, it is such diversity of response – provisional and elusive rather than predictable and guaranteed – which gives the lie to theories which are ‘always-already’ premised on the prior inscription and encoding of consumerism as manipulation.

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INTRODUCTION

Initially: Making a Start

This Thesis engages with a number of commoditised South African cultural forms and practices. I offer some analytical observations about the technologies of display and knowledge construction associated with several South African magazines, shopping malls, and themed leisure locations, suggesting that whatever the power of their capitalist origins, they ought not simply to be glossed as negative expressions of crass, superficial consumer culture. If South African life has come to be read through highly politicised vocabularies, I argue that cultural commentators need also to allow that a commodified culture *is* able to be meaningfully deployed – perhaps creatively, but at least differentially and contradictorily – in contexts of reception and consumption. The very texts that provide my objects of analysis in the Thesis, for instance, are those which, despite being produced by agents of the South African consumer market, form a personal cultural repertoire to which I have turned as a consumer of contemporary culture in moments that I can describe only in terms of diversity, rather than domination: fascination, boredom, melancholy, cynicism, longing, irritation, admiration, and even necessity. I also make the case that for an intellectual to admit this investment in consumer culture is not automatically to affiliate herself with an elitist, anti-democratic politics (or conversely, with romanticised theorisations of cultural resistance). Throughout, I attempt to demonstrate the legitimacy of occupying the ambiguous spaces of commodified culture through a response that takes seriously people's often ambivalent emotional and intellectual investments in 'mass' cultural forms and practices.

The fact that the material with which I am concerned is produced for profit by often oligopolistic financial conglomeration – Associated Magazines, Jane Raphaely & Associates, and Safren's Sun International, for instance – cannot be held completely to determine its meanings. Instead, any meanings such forms may accrue are complexly overdetermined, resistant to linear arguments of capitalist dominance and subjection. Similarly, if many of the cultural forms and practices which characterise South African cultural relations evidence continuities with colonial or American coca-colonial power, these globalising agencies are never simply reproduced once materialised in specific 'other' locations. They are reworked into eclectic local knowledges. As Jim Collins reminds us, terms such as 'the dominant' "serve as convenient concepts on which the blame for all evil may be easily fixed, providing a simple narrative explanation for why utopian states cannot be achieved, as well as for self-righteous poses in the present" (1989:xiv). He draws an analogy between 'the dominant' and 'the devil', suggesting that if 'the devil' makes

for marvellous explanatory myths, most sophisticated theologians would stress that such myths only trivialize the complexity of moral questions and human psychology. In much the same way, 'the dominant' ruling class that controls all facets of cultural life may well be a fascinating methodological fiction, but it only obstructs our understanding of the conflictive power relations that constitute our cultures. A more sophisticated understanding of *domination* as a process must begin with the rejection of the monolithic category of 'the dominant'. (1989:xiv)

The issue in the analysis of consumer culture, clearly, is not to deny that commodity relations may involve repression and the exercise of unequal authority through various combinations of power, privileged access and denial. Rather, it is to understand this domination as located in a diffuse and contested field which can only be mapped through recourse to both empirical and imagined co-ordinates, through contradiction alongside elements of coherence, through individual instance as well as general explanation.

In seeking to imagine creative connections between contemporary cultural 'structures of feeling' and individual uses of culture, we might turn, here, to a paper on global ethnoscapas by

anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, where he reconceptualises the (power)play of mediated identities, discourses and imaginations that have tended to be thought of as 'cultural domination'

the imagination has now acquired a singular new power in social life. The imagination – expressed in dreams, songs, fantasies, myths, and stories – has always been part of the repertoire, in some culturally organized way, of every society. But there is a peculiar new force to the imagination in social life today. More persons in more parts of the world consider a wider set of 'possible' lives than they ever did before. One important source of this change is the mass media, which present a rich, ever-changing store of possible lives, some of which enter the lived imaginations of ordinary people more successfully than others. Important also are contacts with, news of, and rumours about others in one's social neighbourhood who have become inhabitants of these faraway worlds. The importance of media is not so much as direct sources of new images and scenarios for life possibilities, but as semiotic diacritics of great power, which also inflect social contact with the metropolitan world facilitated by other channels. (1991:197-198)¹

Bearing in mind such expanded mass-mediated knowledges, my study is situated within, and focuses on, a South African sociocultural and historical context which spans the late 1980s to the present. More than ever before, I think, this has been a period of South African life saturated in image, style, sign and symbol, one in which 'South Africa', indeed, has functioned as a powerful site and agent of representation. The high visibility of the last days of apartheid, the release of Mandela and the coming to power of a fundamentally-ANC led government of national unity have seen this country occupy an inspirational, even entertainment, function in the global imaginary, as well as provide the kinds of creative mass-mediated image banks necessary in order for local people to begin to imagine themselves as authors of and characters in a 'new' social narrative. The extent to which such narratives involve dramatically innovative roles and/or remobilisations of and intersections with older forms and practices is something which I pursue. If it is true that after the euphoria and hype which ushered in the present political dispensation we have witnessed governmental and popular need to address the explicitly material demands of national and international *realpolitik*, it cannot be denied that this has involved not only the 'facts and figures' of GDPs, the balance of payments, and the RDP (Reconstruction and Development Programme), but conscious, even assertive, recourse to symbol, rhetoric and discourse. The category of the imagination, then, may be thought to occupy a significant place in even the most public, political spaces, and imagination as an elusive, symbolically-resonant capacity may be influential in people's managing and devising of meaningful sociocultural repertoires.

In the Thesis, then, I argue that while the much-maligned texts of a consumer culture are institutionally *produced* – by publishers and advertisers, for instance, or by architects and preferred ideologies – they are also *diversely reproduced*, in the uses to which they are put. As this comment might convey, instead of referring to absolutist notions of the 'dominant' as against 'the consumer', I try to reconceptualise the conventional categories of producer and consumer, regarding both of them as capable of fulfilling the interrelated roles of structure and agency. In a sense, the issue is not that we are 'fed' culture which we then 'consume', but that whatever the superior structural powers of Capital and ownership, the production and reproduction of culture is not easily separable into production, followed by consumption. Nor is consumption best theorised as a finite action which generates inevitable waste product. As Michel de Certeau (1984) suggests (notwithstanding his own problematic attempt to systematise what he admits are the elusive and poetic processes of meaning-making), corresponding to the clamorous, rationalised, centralised and spectacular system of an official economic and political 'production', there is a hidden production – consumption. Accordingly, even those most spectacularly commodified forms of contemporary leisure such as the magazine, the mall, and the themed resort may be made variously, clandestinely, personally meaningful. They thus elude the totalising strategies of any

critical analysis, whether ideology critique, or populist celebration. Consumption, then, is complex.

Expressed slightly differently, there is a tension, as in De Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*, between the range of cultural repertoires or narratives which a society makes available to individuals, and the often idiosyncratic ways in which personal meanings are fashioned out of this 'collective' material. As should become evident in my readings of particular instances of culture in Chapters 1 to 4, South African intellectual commentary on the productive capacities of consumption, media use and mass cultural products is still relatively scarce in comparison with international research. In my opinion, South African researchers from a number of disciplines have over-emphasised commodity culture as an inevitable form of cultural co-optation and manipulation, at the expense of a willingness to consider the production of cultural meaning as a nuanced, erratic, contradictory process involving emotion and the irrational as much as logical attribution.

My purpose is not malevolently to discredit theoretical positions which are premised on political economy and ideology critique. Yet as Meaghan Morris would probably remind me, in arguing for researchers to give more credence to the claims of pleasure, longing, imagination and even contradiction in relation to consumption, I *am* involved in "an active process...of discrediting...the voices of grumpy feminists and cranky leftists" (1990:25). Morris also acknowledges, however, that to discredit – in other words, "to character-ize a fictive position from which anything said can be dismissed as already heard" – is "something very different from displacing an analysis which has become outdated, or revising a strategy which no longer serves its purpose" (1990:25). I feel bound to offer an illustration of such a theoretical position. Although she does not completely warrant the obviously polemical caricature, a reasonably good example of both a 'grumpy feminist and a cranky leftist' is South African internationally at large, Zoë Wicomb, in her piece "Tracing the Path from National to Official Culture" (1991). I have not the space to do justice to what I represent here as Wicomb's 'otherwise' argument (which works from the context of the Sechaba Festival of Culture held in Glasgow in 1990), but a crucial point made near the beginning of the paper is that "the festival phenomenon of dancers scantily clad in animal skins and ethnic micro-skirts, complete with drums" is regularly presented as South African national culture (1991:242). The piece concludes with the claim that a radical culture, rather than striving after 'authenticity', needs to devise radical cultural practices, which will involve exposing the poverty of "the popular cultural fusions and obvious hybridizations popularized through the new media networks..., the popular culture as represented, for instance, on television or syndicated magazines" (1991:250).

Now despite the nature of my own study – which features in Chapter 4 the cultural syncretisms of *The Lost City* – I take Wicomb's cautions concerning the ways in which an ostensibly democratic ANC government, when it enters the international, public relations arena of nation brokering, has expedient recourse to a simulated traditional African identity which trades, among other things, in ethnic and gender stereotypes. Our opinions also correspond on the point that the responsibility of cultural critics is "discussion or analysis" rather than "genuflection" (1991:242) – even if the culture in question is that sanctioned by the ANC. I do have problems, though, with Wicomb's insistent subtext (and here we get to my own grumpiness and crankiness). For I am less than confident that what Wicomb variously nominates as a 'democratic' and a 'radical' culture can painlessly amputate many people's felt needs for admittedly constructed, even manufactured cultural icons and vectors of collective identification. And I am similarly uncertain that any culture – mass mediated or 'traditional' – can be excised of its contradictions and perversities in the name of a coherent political project.

Consider the deeply imagined intellectual radicalism which lies all-too-evidently just beneath the surface of Wicomb's criticism. What does it imply, for instance, about the superior cultural knowledge of the critic, and the misguided, even false consciousness of a mass of 'others'? Since I found myself wondering, at the time, how to process the situation I'm about to describe, I feel justified in finding myself wondering how Wicomb would read the agency of the winning African high school choir in the 1996 Omo Choir Challenge, a competition which was televised on SABC TV1 on November 9. To an auditorium packed with an enthusiastic and vocal audience, the choir gave mobile renditions of what they presented as traditional songs and, after being announced the winners, launched into a eulogy to 'Number 1'. (Were they celebrating themselves as winners? Their choir leader? Omo as sponsor? I do not know.) The contributions of individual choir members both to this laudatory number and to the adjudicated numbers varied, in body and voice, from lustiness to lyricism to shyness to virtual lip synching. Male and female members of the choir wore garments roughly fashioned out of animal skins – loin cloths for the young men; ethnic micro-skirts and bra tops for some of the young women. And oh yes: many of the women were bare-breasted. At whose choice or decree, whose pleasure and politics, I cannot say. Perhaps Wicomb can. I, as cultural critic, would prefer to begin the difficult negotiation of moving from grumpiness and crankiness to more generous and subtle understandings of human constraints and aesthetic-experiential pleasures.

Let me remark, now, that there *is* a tentative shift within South African academic writing to recognise the complexity of the cultures associated with consumer relations. A recent essay by Eve Bertelsen (1998) exemplifies this point. A glance at the title of the paper, "Ads and Amnesia: Black Advertising in the New South Africa", might lead us to imagine that Bertelsen is critical of the ways in which a recent past of overt struggle and political agency is being forgotten in the 'new South African' turn to style, and in the appropriation by advertising agents of the discourses of liberation. The inspirational call "Power to the People", for instance, is now reified as a slogan for an electricity company. Informing Bertelsen's title, I feel, *is* the idea that blackness *ought* to be connected to roots, to an older sense of collective identity: the belief that there are experiences and codes of conduct which are essential to authentic contemporary black South African identity. Yet in the essay itself, Bertelsen works far more ambivalently with emergent discourses of consumerism. In part, she concludes her essay by asserting that "advertising discourse is parasitic...it voraciously absorbs and incorporates other discourses to realign them with the imperatives of the market" (1998:240). Critical of the lack of progressive images and 'ordinary' occupations in black consumer magazines, for instance, she feels that the "atomized consumer subject" which the market encourages is a "feeble substitute" for "the democratic ideal" (1998:241). Yet in almost the same breath she suggests that advertising discourses facilitate important kinds of subjectivity: "together with other texts generated in opinion-forming sites (I have mentioned Parliament, education, and the media generally), they have an important function in redefining and naturalising the co-ordinates of popular understanding" (1998:240). Bertelsen's response, then, is at moments marked by a recognition that the very ads which she would rather analyse as agents of commodification are in fact much more complex indices of aspiration, subjectivity and longing.

Internationally, too, topics such as the production of consumption, style, commodification and the negotiating of identity are proving academic 'crowd pleasers'. The field is vast, and I cannot hope to traverse it thoroughly, but Mica Nava's comments on the British cultural scene of the late 1980s are enlightening. The end of this decade, she explains, saw "the publication of a number of articles about the dilemmas raised by the buying of things, by style, self-adornment and the consumption of images" (1987:204). In broad terms, the debates

have been concerned to establish whether an acknowledgement of the stubborn and complex pleasures afforded by these phenomena is evidence of a more sensitive and progressive analysis than hitherto – capable ultimately of providing the groundwork for a more popular political appeal to both men and women – or whether, as has also been argued, these preoccupations are diversionary, evidence merely of a mid-1980s capitulation to the right, an obfuscation of the stark reality of capitalism's uncompromising hunger for new markets. (1987:204)

The debates that I set up around South African consumer culture in relation to Chapters 1 through 4 take the by now unexceptional poststructuralist liberty of treating as 'text' both ephemeral instances of contemporary print culture and the comparatively more enduring 'concrete' structures of built environment.² I make occasional, apposite cross-references amongst my individual case-studies, rather than developing elaborate linkages, yet the Thesis as an entity is designed to carry an argument about the curiously human and sometimes even humane forms of productivity that are associated with the large, largely centralised forms of spectacular consumption so characteristic of late-twentieth-century leisure and entertainment. It must be said that the study is exploratory in design and method, provisional rather than conclusive in its statements. As the title indicates, the four chapters are envisaged as 'essays' on aspects of contemporary South African consumer culture, and in understanding my purpose it is useful, if quirky, for the reader to resuscitate an archaic meaning of the word 'essay': the verb 'to try', 'to attempt', 'to undertake' and not necessarily to achieve. In other words, I believe that the process of attempting to articulate a response to contemporary South African mass culture that has not previously found much voice is valuable 'in itself', whether or not I arrive at persuasive conclusions. Accordingly, I try to avoid a dominant, totalising ideology in my own speaking-position. Too often in cultural analysis, the researcher, rather paradoxically, "becomes the master of difference, offering the unified theory of difference...the majestic, authoritative overview of the author, flying high above the culture industries like Icarus" (Wark 1992:436-437). Figurative niceties aside, the need for exploratory, inter-mediated speculations such as those which I offer should be beyond dispute in that mediated cultures influence both a South African and a global symbolic universe.

Chapters 1 and 2, in which I discuss aspects of South African magazine discourse, comprise the first 'half' of the Thesis in that the objects of analysis are printed texts, of the sort more-or-less 'usual' within the field of English Studies. Chapter 1, "*Tribute* and Attributed Meaning" considers the house-image and editorial environment of *Tribute* magazine. I relate *Tribute* to the affirmative representation of black identity, to a 'non-racial' ethic that is connected variously to cosmopolitanism and humanism, and to a cultural capital that derives in part from the status of 'English'. In Chapter 2, "Take Another Look: Reading and Re-Reading Women's Magazines", I turn to the magazines *Cosmopolitan*, *Fair Lady*, *Thandi* and *Femina*, all of which are positioned by their editors and publishers as exponents of a liberated, modern South African femaleness and as agents in the reconstruction of gender relations. At the same time, though, they are widely believed by critics, on account of their generic subsumption into the category 'woman's magazine', to reproduce 'negative images' of, and 'stereotypical positions' for, women. In Chapter 2, I explore the constrictions and possibilities of 'woman' as a so-called specialist audience, cross-referencing between a number of South African women's magazines, trying out ideas such as 'gendered genre' and 'cultural repertoire', and working to theorise the spaces of women's leisure in relation to the problematic category of the everyday.

The second 'half' of the study comprises Chapters 3 and 4, titled respectively "Milling Around 'the Mall': (de)Constructing Cultural Knowledge" and "Tropes and Trophies: The Lost City 'Discovered'". Here, the concept of media is extended well beyond the printed page to

include prominent experiential mediators of twentieth-century cultural belief and practice: the arrangement of space into identifiable place, built structure, and thematised retail and entertainment. In Chapter 3, emphasising that monumental size need not discount elusive symbolic meaning, I rehabilitate the shopping mall as an ambiguous cultural icon, rather than insisting on its monotheistic embodiment of expedient forces of speculative Capital. I suggest that this interpretive ambivalence is particularly relevant in the South African context, where consumption is a mode of aspirational mobility that is itself ambiguously encoded: hailed by individuals and government agencies as a route to an individual and a national future, even as it is subjected to oblique criticism in the more conventionally democratic projects of the Reconstruction and Development Programme. Also in Chapter 3, I address 'shopping', 'looking' and 'walking' as typically denigrated kinds of knowledge associated with mall space, asking academics to consider, from the increasingly commodified knowledge-base of 'the university', that these practices are amenable to complex critical understanding. (Here, the reader may discern an indirect debt to De Certeau [1984], in his theorising of quotidian knowledges like reading, cooking and the like as ephemeral, idiosyncratic instances of *parole* that are nevertheless susceptible to the socially-produced structures of *langue*.) In Chapter 4, I turn to The Lost City, an especially dramatic instance of South African leisure-entertainment which is widely thought by academics to epitomise elitist kitsch and facile borrowings from the codes of an ideologically-suspect adventure romance. I consider that the mass-mediated, exhibitionary spectacles by means of which The Lost City is represented to consumers draw attention to the hyperbolic cultural hybridity through which 'Africa' has frequently been mapped by 'the Western imagination', and which South African cultural entrepreneurs from politicians, to advertisers, to marketeers are attempting to promote as features of the country's – indeed 'the nation's' – promise of an *international* modernity. In Chapter 4, by this stage of the Thesis believing myself confidently able to draw on a critical repertoire already established in the preceding discussions, I make the case that The Lost City and its imaginative author Sol Kerzner are not directly descended from banal commodified cultures. They are circuitously implicated in the ordinary *and* in the academic, borrowing from the very tropes that academics in disciplines such as English and Archaeology have used to grant distinction to their valued (their 'heroic') bodies of professional expertise.

I should make clear, here, that despite the often monumental architecture of the built environment of consumption-related leisure which I explore in Chapters 3 and 4, I consider this to be overlayed by and interspersed with people's experiences of mass media technologies like television, film, video and electronic publishing, and cultural genres like advertising, cinema and magazines. These discourses typically grant extended coverage to aspects of entertainment, recreation, human interest, leisure, consumption and consumer information, whether the journalism functions critically or as advertorial announcement, or merely as brief listing. The monumental, as it were, is also prolifically miniaturised through the conventional media in ways that render it humanly meaningful. The mass-mediated 'miniatures' may at some moments reinforce gigantism; at others transfigure it into the ridiculous; and at others reinstate responses of awe. The very experience of being in the collected display of consumer culture in a shopping mall, frequently imagined in terms of the consumption of images and style, rather than as simple spending, has been likened to looking onto the world from within a vast television set (Kowinski 1986). Margaret Morse (1990), further, takes the dramatic conceptual leap of theorising malls, freeways and television as cognate chronotypes of late-twentieth-century existence. This theoretical framework does not make for a Thesis in which South African consumer culture is eulogised. But it does provoke important questions about the grounds on which culture is to be

evaluated by a South African academic who, like myself, is located in the discipline of English Studies.

From the outset, my own particular interest has been to consider aspects of what I can only conjure through an unsatisfactorily cumbersome collation of labels as popular/ contemporary/ mass/ urban/ leisure/ consumer/ middle class/ lifestyle cultures, which have been criticised by disaffected intellectual constituencies as politically co-opted, vacuous or necessarily destructive. Depending on the particular context to which one is referring, different groupings of these terms might need to be brought into play, along with any number of other terms such as South African, American, Western, regional, local, national, female, male, and so on. To imagine that fixed designations such as 'mass' and 'popular', or 'South African' and 'American' can adequately describe the field of magazines, malls and themed leisure environments is seriously to misunderstand the syncretic nature of contemporary cultural experience. Certainly, such terms may be used, but their use will invariably involve an attempt by a critic – who is, after all, another 'user' – to represent the culture concerned in strategically preferred ways.³

Let me make a few pointed observations about the adjectives 'mass' and 'popular'. If I occasionally resort to 'mass' out of necessity, when I have worked myself into a linguistic or conceptual corner, I do so with discomfort. This is largely because within the Humanities, this appellation, when placed in conjunction with 'culture', still tends to be used with disapproval, often mimicking – despite theoretical advances – the form of fears expressed by both F.R and Q.D. Leavis concerning the rise of a morally and formally superficial advertising discourse, a 'mass culture' that inevitably debased most people's already debilitated capacities for discrimination. When it comes down to it, in fact, even the sophisticated, cryptic semiosis of American postmodernity that has been developed by the likes of Baudrillard through the Situationists, can be covered under the umbrella-term 'critique of mass culture'. Despite contemporary paradigms based on such theoretical nuances as heteroglossia and discourse analysis, then, condemnations of mass culture on the grounds of cultural apocalypse and chaos, or cultural standardisation, control and insipid passivity, have by no means been superseded. When coupled with materials produced by big business for profit, in fact, the adjective 'mass' is still persistently held to allude to vast numbers of culturally-impoverished people. Nor, in the particular South African context, has 'mass' been successfully re-imagined by cultural critics through creative semantic borrowings from the optimistic collectivity of the Mass Democratic Movement, a loose grouping of organisations opposed to apartheid which was instrumental in imagining cross-cultural, -class, -race and -gender alliances in late-1980s South Africa. Nor have academics been open to the probability – routinely contemplated in the discourses of professional media planning and analysis – that so-called mass collectivity and mass audiences, whatever their numbers, are in fact mythic rather than empirical entities. Along with Culture, the ostensibly 'mass' audience imagined by those with a fearful, vested interest in defending the truly Cultural has transmuted into multiple spheres to which people erratically envisage themselves to belong. They select their preferred cultural discourses from a range of choices available (Collins 1989:2-3). While such recognitions do not eliminate the difficulties of engaging with forms of 'mass' or 'popular' or 'contemporary' culture in the academic context, they at least begin by conceding that the contemporary cultural field is not unitary and fixed, but a destabilised, fragmented assemblage of positions. These recognitions also allow me to gesture towards the difficulty that 'the mass' is, in ways frustrating to me as an academic researcher, intractably unknowable despite my best efforts to conjure its multiple subjectivities. Whatever the convictions of so much cultural critique, 'the mass' is massively heterogeneous, and thus never fully assimilable into institutional space and discourse.

It is time, too, that South African cultural commentators took the cue from De Certeau (1984) and admitted as much of 'the people' and 'the popular'. For if I am uncomfortable with the term 'mass', I am not that much happier with what has happily been called 'the popular'. Considered at the level of abstraction, meanings of 'the popular' seem to include 'well-liked by many people'; 'inferior kinds of work'; 'work deliberately setting out to win favour with the people', and 'culture actually made by the people for themselves' (Williams 1976:236-238). One of the obvious comments to make concerning this list, I think, is the difficulty of arriving at a precise description. Any definition involves a complex interplay of meanings which reach far beyond an initial 'widely favoured or well-liked'. In trying to explain 'popular', it could be said, it is necessary to give attention to the spread or number of people interested in any form; yet we might take John Storey's caution that the overly 'quantitative definition' is compromised on the grounds that much so-called 'high' culture can also claim to be 'popular' if we judge only by sales and audience numbers (1993:6). This notwithstanding, it increasingly seems to me that a definition of popular culture can be little more specific than 'material and experiences which are variously used and enjoyed by some, if never all, people'. This would at least allow the shifting relations which characterise the cultural field, where the voice, reputation and cultural capital of an opera star such as Pavarotti can be differentially deployed in diverse contexts: from the opera house proper, to the advertising jingle, to the soccer stadium. Or where the magazine *Tribute* can be situated within the journal market in what initially seem to be contradictory terms: a jet-set cosmopolitanism, the didactic persuasion of African humanism, and the status discourse of Western literariness embodied in forms such as the short story and the lyric poem. Repeatedly, then, what I am dealing with is not material that is intrinsically 'popular', but that is variously mobilised in various contexts by various agents.

This becomes increasingly obvious when we outline several influential ways in which the expression 'the popular' has been used by South African academics in defining areas of cultural study. The 'popular' has not existed, conceptually, without what has implicitly been imagined as its perverse inverse – 'mass'. In South Africa, a country devised along eugenicist racial lines, 'popular' has often been used by academics as a linguistic figure to reclaim positively many forms of marginalised 'black culture'. It has typically been the adjective of choice for self-styled radical cultural analysts in their efforts to refute simple notions of the indiscriminating consuming mass. Consider how English Studies, under the marxist energies of the 1970s, and the feminist-postcolonial pressures of the 1980s, has been persuaded to make space for the kinds of 'popular' expression popularly understood in South African literary discourse to mean 'black' cultural production: so-called black working class culture and 'black experience', as well as the 'recovery' of voices which were silenced under the combined weight of apartheid, patriarchy and empire. This rehabilitation has frequently entailed, however, a highly selective engagement not merely with forms of literary-creative culture, but with the features of a mass-mediated contemporaneity. Implicitly, here, the general field of 'contemporary culture' has often continued to be dismissed by local intellectuals as proof of the neo-colonial globalism of American capital and culture.

To take a particular instance of South African criticism's use of the term 'popular': in a discussion of black South African performance in the volume *Rethinking Culture*, Steadman begins by explaining that what "defines popular culture is its relation to a dominant culture" (1989:114). In terms of his claim, 'popular' is more or less synonymous with 'alternative'. This raises a few problems though, largely because 'alternative', in a local context, is discursively saturated. It can be associated with supposedly oppositional cultural forms like 'black theatre' (Steadman uses the expression in an analysis of Matsemela Manaka's play *Pula*), with the 'radical' press (the now defunct weekly newspaper the *New Nation*), and with the residually

modernist, avant garde iconoclasm of white artists such as Beezy Bailey, who in the 1980s earned critical acclaim and gallery space by showing his own work under the guise of an invented black domestic worker, Joyce Ntombi. Similarly, if 'popular' is meant to signify alternative in the sense of 'not academic', this too easily denies the role of academics in constructing popular cultural terrains: a number of worker plays of the 1970s and 1980s, for example, whether we're referring to the concept, the collective scripts, the filmed reproductions of the dramas or the discursive field of 'worker theatre' in general, are as much the result of intervention by academic workers in Sociology and English as they are of grievances germane to trade unionists on the shopfloor. In glossing the term 'popular', however, Steadman without any irony refers the reader to a boxed text-insert which explains that the growing interest in popular performance during the 1970s "was rapidly expressed in three doctoral dissertations on indigenous South African performance" (1989:113). And few South Africans, I think, would understand 'alternative' to encompass the range of undeniably popular contemporary cultures. These incorporate both local and international material, and are manifest in the formal heterogeneity of the Heinemann African romances series, styled after Mills and Boon paperbacks; Brenda Fassie, South African 'bad girl' of black pop; and the Aloaha Tahitian theme village at the Wild Coast Sun Casino and resort. It is by no means self-evident, then, how 'popular culture' is inevitably a form, or collation of forms, which exists at a remove from 'the dominant'. To some, popular culture may indeed seem to *be* the dominant: a lowbrow, superficial, substandard mass culture implicitly defined as the residual category which remains once one has established the boundaries of high (and deep) culture. Overall, it remains problematic that in rejecting the orthodoxies of a narrow canon-forming academic South African cultural commentary has tended to reify previously repressed cultural expression and practice into an *authentic* popular culture, one regarded as ideologically preferable to the *mass* cultural texts and practices of an 'imperialist false consciousness industry'. Even in the late 1990s, when Frankfurt School echoes of 'co-optation', 'media manipulation' and 'false consciousness' are comparatively easy to debunk, it is difficult to break an academic tendency to trade in invocations of the researcher's or the research subject's 'impeccable' working-class origins or oppressed backgrounds or ideological correctness. These are presumed to legitimate the ethics of the academic's own research.

It must be observed that something of this is evident in my own work on *Tribute*, which derived from late-1980s discourses of race and political progressivism, and an academe dominated by a need to address apartheid's silences. When I started writing this study, I was interested in 'media matters' within the context of 'English'. And I began with the section on *Tribute*. When I reconsider my motives and method now, an eagerness to seem to be involved in a valid area of research (both morally, and in terms of institutional endorsement), perhaps encouraged me to address an example of *black* mass-mediated culture in the unvoiced assumption that the 'blackness' of the cultural form would offset its questionable commodified dimension. Things became a lot more complicated, however, and I was gradually given to theorise my intellectual investment in the topic as 'a white, middle-class, female academic'. As I struggled to acknowledge, a critic cannot efface the interrelated race, class, gender and other allegiances in terms of which her or his institutional identity is negotiated, in order to effect seamless bonds of solidarity with a simulacral 'popular' that has been imagined for the purposes of research. Paradoxically, too, while privileged institutional affiliations and knowledges mean that academics can never exactly occupy the 'popular' or 'mass' positions they might wish to study, the process of writing the Thesis has emphasised the need for academics to admit their positionings *within* a mass or popular commodity culture. The academic researcher is not privileged to occupy a knowledge or space untouched by the sensationalism, constrictions and ambiguous pains and

pleasures of contemporary mass-mediated culture. In much academic engagement with the contemporary, as Stacy Warren explains, the focus on ‘the popular’ is defined through the eyes of the working classes...or clearly marginalized subcultures..., thus side-stepping examination of middle-class, mass-mediated cultures” (1993:178), and refuses to take seriously the possibilities and constrictions of mass cultural life. I suggest that those theories of culture which strive to discover and then to validate as ‘popular’ only supposedly authentic, uncommodified traces of human life have more to do with a puritanical leftism than with politically credible theorisations of the contemporary.

To take this argument in a perhaps unexpected direction, academics might be reminded that theory, too, is a mass cultural commodity: intellectual discourses, ideas, texts and paradigms – often complex, abstruse and thus possibly ‘elitist’ – are commodified through their dissemination on conference and publishing circuits, at book fairs, in journals. As the theories gradually gain popular or at least wider cultural currency (and mastery) via magazines, film, television and other forms of media, ever newer, more subtly different versions are devised by researchers anxious to distinguish themselves (temporarily) from the plodding herd of academic and other followers. (I consider myself one of the accused.) As McKenzie Wark observes, there is no reason in principle why an ‘academic discourse’ should be thought a discrete cultural sphere:

the flow of cultural commodities, the books, magazines and conferences that are its stock in trade are [not] any different from any other such flow. Every cultural commodity belongs to a fuzzy set of related merchandise and with a milieu of users who construct singular but overlapping tactics out of such fragments. Different cultural commodities have different speeds and different distributions, to be sure, but I see no difference in principle between Australian academics practising Birmingham school cultural studies and the Japanese Elvis clones practising the hip-wiggle in Harajuku Park. Both make use of the commodities arrayed for them to choose from in a given space, at a given time. In both cases the distribution of cultural commodities is an effect of a particular, historical vector-field of transnational communication. (1992:435-436)

As will by now be clear, the present volume arises from my institutional positioning within a South African English Studies of the late 1980s, in which new paradigms and positions had become available to the researcher. Yet the reference to English Studies remains tricky: the Thesis crosses conventional disciplinary boundaries, but still seeks to imagine a value for the kinds of creative, imaginative responses which could be said to characterise English Studies in what I consider to be its most meaningful form. Working from within English Studies, I’ve had not only to acknowledge that the cultures of magazines, malls and leisure environments have habitually been disparaged as instances of superficial consumer society by English Studies intellectuals (whether explicitly in conversation or in the more authoritative academic form of the article, or by fact of omission and lack of interest), but that these cultures are still widely held to be beyond the provenance of English departments. It was one thing to discover, for example, that even T.S. Eliot was able to envisage ‘Englishness’ as an (alarming) hybrid: “Derby Day, Henley Regatta, Cowes, the twelfth of August, a cup final, the dog races, the pin-table, the dart board, Wensleydale cheese, boiled cabbage cut into sections, beetroot in vinegar, nineteenth-century Gothic churches and the music of Elgar” (1948:31). But it was another to reconcile this hybridly English national identity with the insistently hierarchical conceptions of culture that, derived from Eliot and his ilk, came to prevail in an English Studies critical lexicon. In terms of such classifications, ‘low’ and ‘popular’, whatever one’s stomach for boiled cabbage, were never the real way to go. Not surprisingly, then, despite Simon Frith’s contention that English has always been, in its genealogy and its methodological pluralism, a kind of ‘cultural studies’ (1992), I’ve had to negotiate my way around a number of negative perceptions. The accusation of political compromise (the setting of symbols before real human suffering) you will already have derived

from my preceding discussion. Here is another, equally uncomfortable suspicion: ‘this kind of research’, this ‘mall’s thing’ – it is, well, not really serious, not real intellectualism at all, but a version of academic juvenilia. I gave up trying to counter this one; my earnest explanations struck the auditors as oxymoronic in the face of the ‘subjective’ nature of my response to my material, and the fact that the subject matter was drawn, after all, from my lived experience. (As the reader of the Thesis will see, ‘I’ am variously present in the four chapters of the Thesis, and I experiment with the provisional authority that may be granted a self-reflexive critical subjectivity.) At the very least, even several colleagues who *were* curious about what I was attempting inquired: Surely one did not write up one’s academic findings in so personal (and colloquial) an idiom? English Studies: some subjects are difficult to broach. I have probably spent more time trying to justify my research on commodity culture than is demanded of the South African Shakespeare specialist, or the white South African theorist of black oral culture who speaks no African language.

Yet at the same time as some in English Studies have put me to intellectual task, I have gained valuably from the many versions of recent English Study which have thoughtfully responded to the claims of theory and previously marginalised experience. My debt here is to various uneasy alliances of feminisms, psychoanalyses, poststructuralisms, discourse analyses and reader-reception theories; all have allowed me to work in the spaces between conventional oppositions of text and experience, culture and society, media and reality, so as to explore the ‘landscapes’ and ‘mindscapes’ of consumption with more than mere colonisation in mind.

As concerns English Studies retaining for me a kind of cultural authority: at its most simple (if I may fabricate such a long-vanished position), my method constitutes an extension of an enduring willingness within English literary studies to understand meaning as involving both formal and sensuous engagement with imaginative material. Yet the Thesis is not predicated upon now discredited, traditional notions of genius and immanence; and when it offers value judgements, these do not take the naive route of great works over minor players. Nevertheless, my Thesis does emanate from what is still, despite inter-disciplinary co-operations, institutionalised as a particular discipline. In relation to a dramatically reconceptualised range of mass-mediated experience, my cultural analyses strategically remobilise a number of signs familiar from the study of literature, among them ‘narrative’, ‘image’, ‘metaphor’, ‘author’. My very position, in being premised on self-reflexive critical discourse, exemplifies the paradox inevitably attendant upon any attempt by English Studies to address contemporary cultural forms: how to situate ‘literature’ within broadly cultural discourse while simultaneously retaining some sense of ‘literary’ engagement as a valuable social practice. However much current research and pedagogy demonstrate the value of disciplinary transgressions, it appears that the professional stakes which have emerged as a consequence of disciplinarity are likely to ensure that English Studies’ practitioners will continue to invoke at least a residual or a reconceptualised ‘literariness’ by means of which to define their interests against, or in relation to, fields such as Cultural Studies and Sociology. While I do not pretend that English Studies can legitimately be imagined as an *absolutely* distinct sphere of intellectual knowledge and practice (it would be facile to do so under the disciplinary shifts which currently characterise the Humanities in general), I do consider that my location in an English Studies *enlarged by conflicting theory* exerts an extremely consequential influence over the kind of ‘cultural study’ which I carry out. The commentary involves not simply the analysis of discrete works, or self-evident content, or even of circumstances of production, for instance, but gives attention to matters of form and style while attempting to imagine connections between econo-political determination, and the ways in which audiences, readers, users, viewers might generate meaning. At the very least, since I re-stage the

rhetorics of English Studies in relation to unusual material, it should be evident that I am turning away from an exclusively conceived concept of 'the literary' because it cannot speak to the diversity of contemporary South African life.

Instead of privileging the literary as textually intrinsic moral-aesthetic achievement, I am interested in exploring how clines of the literary appear in curiously folded forms in the discourses of commodity culture; how Literature, with a capital 'L', in some instances continues to be invested with an idealised cultural capital; how literature, in the lower case, is in other instances jumbled into the cultural melting pot. As will subsequently be argued in more detail, I maintain that the literary's intersecting interests with the often contradictory discourses associated with form, pattern, style, imagination, context, author and reader emphasise valuably different aspects of cultural study from those which have featured in the dominant version of South African 'Cultural Studies'. Instead of accepting conventional oppositions of 'text' as against 'context', or 'form' against 'politics' – which may also be cast variously as micrological versus macrological, linguistic versus sociological, political economy versus the cultural field – I attempt seriously to offer a textually nuanced approach to a range of texts within diverse contexts of meaning production.

The interpretation and analysis of a cultural textuality which this entails is not, I believe, to be equated with what some, such as Chrisman (1996), for instance, have wished to represent as a *mere* formalism. Let me turn to Stuart Hall for a brief synopsis of the kinds of emphases with which formalist analysis is associated. He lists

the crucial importance of language and of the linguistic metaphor to any study of culture; the expansion of the notion of text and textuality, both as source of meaning and as that which escapes and postpones meaning; the recognition of the heterogeneity, of the multiplicity, of meanings, of the struggle to close arbitrarily the infinite semiosis beyond meaning; the acknowledgement of textuality and cultural power, of representation itself, as a site of power and regulation; of the symbolic source of identity. (1992:283)

It is difficult to read Hall's quotation out of its intellectual context, but I would say that his position is ambivalent. He values aspects of a (post)structuralist 'textuality', yet he is also anxious about the political implications of an endless deferral of meaning, in which the critic is relieved of the burden of moral commitment. Fair enough, since in the South African situation, to take a context closer to home than the Britain of the 1980s which is Hall's immediate reference point, literary-critical intellectuals are all thoroughly familiar with the argument that History affects so many lives with the blunt force of police brutality that to conceive of history as narrative fabrication and super-real story is not merely to waste time but to renege on an ethical responsibility. Given such overtly declared sociopolitical agency, my own interest in the rhetorics and built structures through which forms of 'middle class' leisure and lifestyle are articulated might be *misinterpreted* as an inappropriate extension of English Studies' imagined preoccupation with textually immanent meaning; or perhaps as an equally ill-considered celebration of 'modernity' understood as formal innovation; or as an unwillingness to locate critique firmly within conditions of econo-political inequality and historical injustice. I would certainly agree that approaches to the study of South African contemporary culture which took refuge in textuality while ignoring questions of materiality and social agency would not offer much. And if, trained as I am in a particular version of cultural *disciplinarity* I am partly inclined to baulk at the *undisciplined* infinitude of the poststructuralist 'text', I am also given to admit the probability that no text is available for definitive interpretation, and that meaning thus becomes, by definition, provisional rather than authoritative. To acknowledge this does not render the intellectual amoral. Instead, it grants real space to the problematic areas of human and fictional story that critics are wont to simplify by means of totalising declarations: it is permissible for the cultural analyst to

engage with *this* aspect of the human story, but not *that*; *this* is the obvious Master Narrative, and it cancels out all of *those* marginal stories....If we are uncomfortable, in all of this, about the implications of infinite deferral, we do not even have to go to the deconstructionist extreme in starting to stake out the validity of the case for multiple stories, views, layers of meaning. Why not go back, for example, to Adorno and Horkheimer's influential essay which first appeared in 1944, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception"? This essay, as we know, has come to typify the manipulative culture industry thesis. In it, mass culture is considered to impress "the same stamp on everything. Films, radio and magazines make up a system which is uniform as a whole and in every part"; "Under monopoly all mass culture is identical" (1972:120;121). It must be said that Adorno and Horkheimer's theories were informed by their anxieties as intellectuals displaced from Nazi Germany to what they perceived to be the sterile expanses of an all-too totalitarian North American 'democracy'. Yet even in an essay that has come to be considered a standard of left critique, the authors touch on moments at which the so-called culture industry is turned by individuals to meaningful use. In other words, *despite* their anger against the deceits and exploitations of a rationalised entertainment system – a "bloated pleasure apparatus" which "adds no dignity" (1972:139) to human life – their essay momentarily hints at a perhaps reluctant recognition that some marginally creative-uses of dominant culture are possible. They remark that in

spite of the films which are intended to complete her integration, the housewife finds in the darkness of the movie theater a place of refuge where she can sit for a few hours with nobody watching, just as she used to look out of the window when there were still homes and rest in the evening. The unemployed in the great cities find coolness in summer and warmth in winter in these temperature-controlled locations. (1972:139)

It is such points of interpretative uncertainty and ambivalence to which I give due weight in my research, allowing the likelihood that the meanings and experiences which people attach to cultural forms and practices are always in excess of the interpretations posited by particular intellectuals. While I cannot comprehensively map this interpretative excess in the Thesis, I can at least acknowledge its claims. In considering the possibilities for consumption as a meaningful, even humanly productive practice, my point is neither uncritically to denigrate, nor uncritically to celebrate, the forms and uses of South African consumer culture with which I engage. Instead, I am satisfied to admit an ambivalence: taking some pleasure in women's magazines, for instance, cannot be theorised as deterministically attesting to my ideological victimhood, or to my solipsistic and inhumane hedonism. Yet nor can I suppress the conscious, socially-ever-present knowledge that my sense of full subjectivity 'ought' to be independent of commodified ephemera.

Amidst all of this uncertainty there is, I shall risk arguing, at least one certainty: it has become increasingly difficult to conceive of a textual engagement which is 'purely' with the formalist text 'itself'. This is a straw effigy easily torched for polemical purpose. Particularly in working with material such as magazines, malls and themed leisure, I have been compelled to address the socially-embedded text and its diverse contexts of production-cum-reception. Perhaps a more interesting slant on the point, though, is that I have come to realise that to imagine texts in this way – as socially-embedded and diversely produced and received – constitutes as much a rhetorical construction as the much maligned free-floating text. For no researcher can ever hope to represent or deal with the complete sociality of any text, its implication in complex discursive patternings and disjunctures. Thus even the study which 'progressively' purports to take account of things such as audience, reception and macro and micro context can be but metonymic, selecting a part in place of the whole.

For my part, I make the best of an intractable problem by trying both to bring together and to take apart a range of inevitably 'meta' rather than 'primary' or 'secondary' material which

might help me to imagine the ecumenically social and political nature of any text: articles, reports, images, advertisements from newspapers, magazines, flyers, television, commentary from academic critics, as well as passing comment from passing people; solicited letters as well as survey-type material with the pretence of objective analysis. These are as much my texts as the magazines, malls and themed leisure of the title. All of this is simply by way of explanation that to refer to 'texts' as rhetorical and discursive systems is not by definition to trade in truisms of sterile formalism at the expense of intersecting contexts. In Fredric Jameson's eloquent phrasing, when

properly used, the concept of the 'text' does not, as in the garden-variety semiotic practice today, 'reduce' these realities to small and manageable written documents of one kind or another, but rather liberates us from the empirical object – whether institution, event, or individual work – by displacing our attention to its *constitution* as an object and its *relationship* to the other objects thus discussed. (1981:296-297)

As I have indicated, the range of cultural 'constitutions' and 'relationships' with which I work in the Thesis might be considered by some to sit uneasily within 'English Studies'. But it should also be observed that this disciplinary positioning has allowed me to offer a different slant on 'cultural study' than has tended to predominate in the field of South Africa Cultural Studies. I have not been able to consider myself intellectually 'at home' in the most prominent form of local cultural study: the University of Natal's Centre for Cultural and Media Studies. In order to justify this claim, a minor detour is needed.

As the preceding discussion will have indicated, several forms of cultural study have been carried out in South Africa. Indeed, it is reasonable to argue, with Brantlinger (1990), that the dispersal of cultural study across academic fields is valuable rather than disabling, since the transgressive quality necessitated by a detailed contextualised study of culture is best encouraged by interdisciplinarity, by the crossing of professional boundaries. In the Thesis, I do a good deal of such crossing myself. A complete list of even the South African research able to be covered by a broad cultural studies umbrella is impossible to produce; a few examples will have to suffice: Bunn (1996), Chapman (1989), Coplan (1985), Couzens (1982a, 1982b and 1983), Hofmeyr (1989), McClintock (1978), Noyes (1992), Tomaselli, Tomaselli and Muller (1981, 1986 and 1989), Willoughby (1991)...these are some among the many local academics who have offered intellectual commentary that might loosely be termed 'cultural study'. There have been analyses of South African newspaper journalism and film, of oral poetry, of newspaper cartoons, of worker theatre, of campus unrest, of women's health....Similarly disparate are the disciplinary affiliations of the researchers: Sociology, Cultural and Media Studies, Geography, History, English....Much of this commentary, while it does not neatly intersect with my own, has helped to make possible my preferred position, in which I grant the historicity, the sociology, the political economy of cultural artefacts and actions, while giving more attention than has often been the case to creative capacity, to protean meanings, to volatile imaginative possibilities. As I indicate below, Guy Willoughby's review (1991) of Keyan Tomaselli's *The Cinema of Apartheid* (1988) especially helped to focus my thoughts. It gave a tentative critical authority to dissatisfactions that I had myself been experiencing, and reinforced my belief that a researcher from English Studies could make a worthwhile contribution to the reading of South African commodity culture.

The need for such readings becomes clear when one turns from a disciplinarily diffuse South African cultural studies to Cultural Studies as formally understood. It may be, for Steadman, that the "most important achievement in the hybrid field called Cultural Studies has been to articulate the relationship of symbolic discourses to political change" (1989:113), but this position tends *not* to have been prominent in the academically-dominant form of South African cultural studies

research. When considering this field as explicitly nominated 'Cultural Study' within the tertiary institution, the official title, as I have said, belongs to the University of Natal's Centre for Cultural and Media Studies. Despite the existence countrywide of other centres, departments and the like given to the study at universities and technikons of subjects such as the media, journalism and African culture, this is the most visible research base for *cultural and media* studies in South Africa, the only centre quite of its kind in the country. It is at the CCMS, established by Keyan Tomaselli in 1986 under the label Contemporary Cultural Studies Unit, where a handful of South African intellectuals have made the most determined attempt to codify cultural studies as a specific, postgraduate discipline.⁴ Crucial to my own work is the acknowledgement that the forms which the discipline has taken have preferred context over complex readings of textuality, the political demand over the cultural signifier.

It would be mistaken to assert that the Tomaselli initiative has not had a valuable agency in shaping South African cultural research. While Willoughby takes what I consider to be much-needed issue with the tendency towards "surveys, assertions and factual foliage" (1991:71) that characterises an influential publication by Keyan Tomaselli, for instance, it also bears remarking that the Centre has not simply endorsed the mechanistic, decontextualised information flow models which seem to have determined 'mass communication' scholarship in local and American Communications Studies. Further, the journal *Critical Arts*, now produced under the auspices of the Centre, has given increased academic prominence to South African and international media issues, and volume 3 number 2 of 1984 was an early contribution to the debate about the relationship between English and Cultural Studies in South Africa. In other words, the Centre's staff and postgraduate students *have* valuably relocated cultural products and practices, including literature, within terrains of politics and power. Badenhorst, for example, perceives that a "fascination with cultural meaning, and the texts which produce meaning" has featured in the Centre's work (1992:59). The Centre

has concentrated on values and meanings shaped by newspapers, magazines, radio, television, films, and advertising. With reference to the South African government during the 1980s, the Unit has underlined the fact that those controlling the media have a chance to control meanings and messages. The battle for hegemony, then, embraces the struggle for meaning in language, words, slogans, songs, and gestures. (1992:59)

Yet the fact is that the Centre has tended to situate language and symbol in the undisputed master control of a menacing social and political dominant, an emphasis which veers towards a crudely positivist certitude rather than facilitating the nuanced interpretation of textual meaning. As Willoughby remarks of Keyan Tomaselli's *The Cinema of Apartheid* (1988)

key terms, like mantras, litter the linguistic landscape, without irony or investigation: 'capital/ist/ism', 'dominant ideology', 'legitimation', 'co-option', 'class structures'...etc, etc. Little of this is argument, appeal, the staging of knowledge; it is a call to arms, a marshalling of ideological allies, a hammer on the jerking knee; it is bad polemic, dressed up as good science. (1991:73)

For the researcher with a more literary orientation, this could be argued of much of the Centre's work. It has allowed little space for the theorising of a shifting, ambiguous textuality and reception: "what one misses, I guess," says Martin Trump in a review of *Narrating the Crisis: Hegemony and the South African Press* (1987), a volume edited by intellectuals from the Centre, is a 'literary' touch" (1989:163). Despite the 'narrating' of the title, he explains, there is scant attention granted the rhetorical tactics through which communication is carried out, and no regard for the complicated layering of response and meaning that English Studies academics associate with narrative in the literary context.

At this point, perhaps a little (and an inevitably '*partial*') cross-reference to the history of the Centre is called for. In its original nomenclature – the 'Contemporary Cultural Studies Unit'

– the Durban Centre gestures towards Birmingham University's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) as an originary impulse. Both in principle and practice, the Durban project was influenced by the model of Birmingham, which had had an important role in shifting conceptions of 'culture' in post-World War II British society. What sorts of emphases would this lineage lead us to expect? Let me refer merely to two early figures who were influential in the development of a culturalist direction in British cultural studies. Consider Richard Hoggart, for instance, who sought to develop a literary-anthropological appreciation of aspects of 'ordinary' British culture. Rather than retaining a high/low cultural distinction, he began to examine as lived experience the structures of his own British working-class origins. In *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), he offered what was billed as a "vivid and detached [*sic*] analysis of the assumptions, attitudes, and morals of working-class people in Northern England and the way in which magazines, films, and other mass media are likely to influence them" (front cover). There is also, of course, the monumental figure of Raymond Williams. Although using more traditional, 'elite', 'literary' material than Hoggart, Williams drew on his Welsh working-class origins to reconceptualise culture as potentially ordinary, and considered cultural studies to entail an analysis of a whole way of life and structure of feeling. In volumes such as *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (1958) and *The Long Revolution* (1961), Williams represented literature as but one discourse in the human signifying system; but one structure through which social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced, and explored.

The emphatically culturalist interests of these fore-figures, interests which strove to manage the symbolic alongside the empirical-historical, suggests that Tomaselli's unit would from its inception have begun to analyse the complex *network* of relations which has constituted South African cultural experiences. In fact, what seems to have occurred is that the original interest of British cultural studies in 'ordinary' culture and subsequently in 'subordinate' groups has been interpreted in the agenda of the Centre at the University of Natal as a "need for the systematic study of representations arising out of the cultural activity of *repressed* [*sic*] people" (Tomaselli 1989:7). We should allow, of course, that cultural studies in this country evolved in a post-1970 ideological space which saw academic discourse provoked in explicitly committed directions by several versions of Marxism and feminism. We ought also to recognise that the institutional formalising of South African Cultural Studies coincided with a time of political volatility and aggressive resistance to apartheid. As Keyan Tomaselli affirms in *Rethinking Culture*, the Centre "was planned, set up and developed during the crises that followed the Soweto insurrection in 1976" (1989:7), a period which saw the state assert ever-more repressive controls over the townships, the media and the universities, in attempts to control people, images and information. Tomaselli expands on this, pointing out that the

state targeted media and popular culture as the 'enemy' – it cobbled [*sic*] the commercial press, banned cultural festivals, films and videos and print media. It detained and intimidated academics, media and cultural workers. The government banned reporting in 'unrest' areas and blamed the foreign media for the violent reactions of a brutalised black populace. (1989:8)

Given such circumstances, it could seem inevitable, and proper, that cultural studies assumed within the South Africa university a far left position. Yet this Left left out the imaginative projections of cultural use; the dramatic plurality of personal interpretations; the muddled intentions and meanings that may be attached even to a declaratively political rhetoric. Now, in the late 1990s, South Africans are struggling to materialise the hopes and promises of a new, democratic dispensation, and one might argue that despite the logic and morality of the macro emphasis which characterised a South African Cultural Studies' interest in institutional policy and 'state ideology' in the 1980s, this has been constructed at the expense of 'struggle' more

creatively conceived in relation to the use of labour and leisure time, for instance, or the elusive negotiation of identity in indirect relation to commodified cultural forms. The fact that the 'unit' has changed its name to the Centre for Cultural and Media Studies is also telling, as is the slant towards the 'production' of 'media specialists' evident in the current postgraduate programme. The emphasis falls on a culture of technological expertise rather than on nuanced critical-analytical assessment of culture in its mass-mediated South African variety. Recently too, in keeping with demands that all university-affiliated centres be productive at the undergraduate level, intellectuals associated with the Centre for Cultural and Media Studies have mounted first-year programmes which teach students the workings of the media as a profession. I am in favour of vocational training, but ask that it give due attention also to complex cultural analysis. The dominant form of local cultural studies, instead, has generally ignored, oversimplified or only tangentially commented on, the mediations of social identity offered in the discourses of popular monthly and fortnightly mass circulation periodicals: a flyer announcing the Centre's noteworthy research, for instance, highlights a project investigating *distribution* patterns and problems of the periodical press in the townships. Similarly, while special issues of *Critical Arts* have been given to the subject of South African film, the emphasis has fallen on the film *industry*, preferential funding, production histories and state interventions in film-making, rather than on readings of material which allow for elusive cultural codings and the curious processes by which people order the 'experiential' and 'psychic' data of their lives. Perhaps such areas of study and suitably flexible methodologies simply were not thought of (they had yet to be imported from the metropole?); perhaps they did not seem urgent; or perhaps such cultural formations were considered intrinsically trivial, bourgeois, oppressive? Willoughby observes of Tomaselli's *The Cinema of Apartheid*, for example, that

Tomaselli is continually snide about what he calls 'esthetics'..., and by this term he seems to have in mind a footling concern with ornament, always at the expense of material realities....Tomaselli appears not to allow that artefacts have a complex appeal to the senses, intellect and compacted experience...of...[an] audience; an appeal that must (in the oldest formulation of aesthetics) arouse, or in some way involve, pleasure. (1991:69)⁵

Without unduly oversimplifying the nuanced historical-theoretical lineage of South African Cultural Studies, then, it seems permissible to suggest that if the Centre's affiliates have usefully relocated cultural practices, including literature, within terrains of politics and power, the preferred epistemology of 'cultural policy' and 'political economy' has over-emphasised hard news journalism, audiovisual formats and apparatuses, and supposedly alternative, working class culture, while de-emphasising the role of the imagination in the creation of broadly popular cultural spaces. (It's tempting, but probably mistaken, to regard this as an adjunct of the particular metropolitan-colonial vectors at work: theories derived from downmarket Birmingham, say, rather than a postmodern, deconstructionist Paris.) Only lately, explains Steadman, has South African Cultural Studies begun to acknowledge "the 'softer' areas of cultural consciousness as important signifiers of the 'harder' matters of class formation and political alignment" (Steadman 1989:113). I refute the causal hierarchy underpinning Steadman's claim – 'soft' as merely a formal and psychic precursor of the seriously 'hard' – but suffice it to say that an axiom of such cultural studies' preferences has been the relegating of 'middle class' or 'mass' or 'consumer' cultural forms to the margins of morality, and a stress on the manipulative, deceptive aspects of the Frankfurt School's culture industry thesis, rather than an engagement with examples of their more sympathetic analyses of commodified forms.

Within a CCMS version of South African cultural studies (and this is paradoxical, given valuable CCMS critiques of 'the literary'), the cultural *form* and its initial production have tended

to assume an immanence and authority severed from the difficult to quantify reception *practices* through which meaning is generated. Despite local Cultural Studies investigations of media types and policy, for instance, there has been a predilection not to allow the mass-mediated cultures of a South African contemporaneity much imaginative and ideological complexity. In relation to the macropolitical, ‘hard’ emphases such as those which have often characterised dominant forms of South African Cultural Study, then, I am interested to see whether the cultural researcher with an explicit interest in *literary* discourses can bring to the analysis of South African culture a few understandings ‘othered’ by prevailing emphases in South African cultural theory. At the same time, I hope to avoid the tendency, in South African English Studies of the late 1970s through to the present, to disdain mass-mediated culture and to privilege as genuinely ‘popular’ only an extremely narrow repertoire of contemporary cultures – black and workerist. Similarly, in struggling to (re)claim for English Studies the value of ‘relevance’ that is to be derived from a broadened field of cultural analysis, nor can I unproblematically claim for my project an ‘activist’ communication practice, or a foundation of ‘democratic’ principles. Certainly, there is no longer ideological room for academics to trade on romanticised conceptions of oppositional intellectual agency, or on a black South African presence which, however metropolitan, is influenced more by traditional orality than by television, more by trade unionism than the consumer culture of Sales House Club magazines. My point is not to efface one form of identity at the expense of the other, but to acknowledge that cultural research requires the intellectual to imagine audiences whose allegiances are differently constructed at different moments, and to develop a self-reflexive sense of the researching self.

As comments already made in this Introduction will have made clear, the theoretical ideas which I use to formulate my argument cannot usefully be classified through the doxa of a particular intellectual, or even cultural studies ‘school’. But this methodology is valuable, I maintain, precisely because it allows me to negotiate conceptual and disciplinary boundaries while declaring my position as an English Studies practitioner. If a more precise mapping is necessary, let me say that I enter what Storey calls the ‘cultural field’ even while taking account of the political territory (1993), and that I use skills and concepts which have been popularised in intellectual life by a number of disparate researchers who have sought to theorise the meta, symbolic, and imaginative meanings of cultural forms and practices in relation to their materiality. Most important, I think, is that I plan my route through *English Studies*, taking as my guide comments made by Guy Willoughby (1991) and Martin Trump (1989). Both critics, from within my own discipline, remark on unsatisfying and even absurd omissions in the intellectual hegemony of research by members of the CCMS, and they suggest that it is by occupying such interstices that contemporary South African English Studies can make its contribution to the analysis of local culture.

Accordingly, my task is to explore such areas of cultural analysis as the narrative patternings and conventions which inform ‘textual structure’; the role of the imagination in ‘managing’ human power relations; the rhetoric associated with the construction of social fictions; the inter-textual nature of consumer relations, and the potential for human agency and empowerment in the imaginative remobilisation of politically-compromised cultural forms. Perhaps, when it comes down to it, my approach is characterised by nothing more dramatic than a willingness to grant close, yet conceptually eclectic attention to a complexly conceived ‘textuality’: one imagined to involve textual structure, the social structuration of textuality, and the intersection of ‘texts’ with disjunctive, often competing codes of contemporary identity. Yet as my Introduction has made clear, even the claiming of such a simple agenda has entailed a series of complicated theoretical engagements.

Notes to Introduction

1. Appadurai's observations, striking in their ability to accommodate both social criticism and human longing, deserve to be much more widely read by cultural commentators. He seeks ways in which to reach for the possibilities of imaginative play in relation to definitions of self and society in a highly mediated and unequal contemporary world. As he explains, one of the principal shifts in the global cultural order, created by cinema, television, and VCR technology (and the ways in which they frame, and energize other, older media), has to do with the role of the imagination in social life. Until recently, whatever the force of social change, a case could be made that social life was largely inertial, that traditions provided a relatively finite set of 'possible' lives, and that fantasy and imagination were residual practices, confined to special persons or domains restricted to special moments or places. In general, they were antidotes to the finitude of social experience. In the last two decades, as the deterritorialization of persons, images, and ideas has taken on new force, this weight has imperceptibly shifted. More persons throughout the world see their lives through the prism of the possible lives offered by mass media in all their forms. (1991:198)

Importantly, Appadurai is not endorsing a facile view of a mass-mediated world as one which is automatically a better place completely rid of power relations, with more plentiful opportunities for all, and with more happy endings. He goes on to say that what

is implied is that even the meanest and most hopeless of lives, the most brutal and dehumanizing of circumstances, the harshest of lived inequalities, is now open to the play of the imagination. Prisoners of conscience, child laborers, women who toil in the fields and factories of the world, and others whose lot is harsh, no longer see their lives as mere outcomes of the givenness of things, but often as the ironic compromise between what they could imagine and what social life will permit. The biographies of ordinary people, thus, are constructions (or fabrications) in which the imagination plays an important role. (1991:198)

The role which he grants the imagination, then, is admirably social, rather than a free-floating escape.

2. The metaphors of 'textuality' and 'reading' remain the subject of critical debate: it is suggested, for example, that the trope of reading inevitably privileges the sequential modes of experience and perception associated with 'the book'. In the South African context, the matter has recently been addressed in several contributions to *Transgressing Boundaries: New Directions in the Study of Culture in Africa* (1996). Isabel Hofmeyr queries the validity of a cultural analysis that "reduces all questions – even broader political ones – to questions of reading". She argues that we academics need "to relativise our understanding of the book and reading rather than exporting this practice out to all other areas of social life. Academics are generally doomed to believe that the only things to do with books is to read them" (1996:115). As my own work should make clear, however, the 'reading' of diverse cultural materials and practices that fall beyond the conventional boundaries of English Studies *does* entail the sort of relativising for which Hofmeyr calls. This has been argued by many critics, among them Patrick Brantlinger, who reminds us that there is a big difference between 'merely' analysing texts which are thought to be self-sufficient, and expanding one's conceptual horizons so as to accept that the world itself, as a kind of text, is up for critical analysis (1990). Several of the notions of 'textuality' which inform my research are also addressed by Laura Chrisman in *Transgressing Boundaries*. Chrisman views 'textuality' as "a colonial axis of theoretical authority". She asks: Why, at

the very point at which the new South Africa is released from its isolation, is ready to remap its relations to the cultural, intellectual and economic processes of Africa, of the

developing world, of transnationality...adopt a methodology of cultural analysis which favours the micrological over the macrological, which renounces the possibility of there being a social/cultural totality available for critical consideration? Why, at the moment when new forms and processes of transcontinental history and geography can be invented and imagined in South Africa – why embrace a theoretical orientation which eschews historicism and the discipline of history...? Why settle for the insularities and parochialisms of ‘the text’ when ‘the world’ is available for scrutiny. (1996:190)

Chrisman’s is the large rhetorical gesture, and as a reading of her complete article will indicate, she finally steps down from the soap-box to acknowledge that cultural analysis in South Africa today *is* in fact unlikely ever to be completely formalist. It will necessarily take into account material conditions so as to arrive at the ‘text of the world’ to which Brantlinger refers. So much for that contentious squib.

3. Although he is by no means a solitary voice in this matter, Jameson makes this point in his essay “Reification and Utopia”, which appears in *Signatures of the Visible* (1992). Given the South African context in which I am working, it is also useful to turn to a local example of the definitional difficulties with which one is faced in researching aspects of South African ‘popular’ or ‘mass’ culture. It is David Coplan’s *In Township Tonight!* (1985) of which I am thinking. Coplan focusses on varieties of black urban performance influenced unevenly by traditional styles and ideals and by the growing, often aspirational appeal of American film and music. Clearly conscious of the shifting terrain which he is seeking to map, he begins his book, subtitled ‘South Africa’s black city music and theatre’ with “A note on terminology”. Here, with the frequent caution of scare-quotes, he takes on, firstly, the historical-specificity of official racial classifications which have been used in delineating South African ‘population groups’ – ‘African’, ‘Black’, ‘White’, ‘Coloured’, ‘Khoisan’ and so on – choosing for his purposes creatively to overlap categories which he denies have absolute descriptive value. He then proceeds to engage with a variety of labels which have been used by others, and are used in his own research, in the definition and analysis of African society. These are terms which “refer to levels of socio-economic status and quality of urbanisation” (1985:vi), terms such as “elite” (which he uses interchangeably with “middle class” and “petty bourgeois”), “working-class”, “lower-class”, “proletarian” and “migrant”. The third group of terms to which Coplan refers is that which “aids in the analysis of cultural products and processes. These labels function primarily in the classification of performance styles and patterns of development, and their applications may overlap” (1985:vii). In this category, Coplan sees the need to draw attention to often imprecise but still unavoidable labels such as “urban”, “traditional”, “neo-traditional”, “syncretic” and “modern” (1985:vii). Coplan’s fourth and final class of terms is vernacular and colloquial: “shebeen”, say, or “maskanda”. In addition to explaining his vocabulary in the prefatory note, Coplan directs the reader to a glossary at the end of the book.

My point, in all of this, is not to take fundamental issue with Coplan. I wish only to use his case in order to illustrate the extremely convoluted task, in South African cultural analysis, of defining areas of focus, of devising a heuristic categorising structure that can carry one’s own intended meaning while variously allowing and qualifying the meanings preferred by others. I have elected not to follow Coplan’s route. Precisely on account of its inevitable imprecision, such encyclopedic definitional endeavour cannot accurately function as anything but gestural authenticity. It is tempting to propose that if it does facilitate the grouping or structuring of ideas, its symbolic work within academic discourse – whatever

the author's own intentions – is primarily to corroborate the illusion of rigorous intellectual engagement, and even of scientific objectivity.

4. Tomaselli covers the history of the CCSU/CCMS in his inaugural lecture, "A Contested Terrain: Struggle Through Culture" (1987) and in a chapter in *Rethinking Culture* (1989).
5. It is obviously difficult to give a detailed and accurate picture of the Centre's productivity. Single issues of *Critical Arts*, for instance, might well feature readings of culture that do not neatly fit the preferred institutional take. In fact, I quite eagerly await the latest issue of the journal in which appears a version of my Chapter 3 on shopping malls. The eagerness has to do with an interest in the theoretical positionings of my bedfellows. The journal contains an article on discourses of mass-mediated unity in current South Africa, as well as another on 'black' soaps such as *The Bold and the Beautiful*. Both articles emanate from student research carried out under the aegis of the Centre and I am curious to see the 'line' which is taken on material that might seem to be quite out of line with the Centre's image so far. Perhaps a different kind of student is subjecting the intellectual hegemony of the Centre's founders to subtle but significant realignment?

CHAPTER ONE

Tribute: Attributing Meaning to a 'Black' South African Consumer Magazine

This Chapter is both about and round-about the consumer magazine *Tribute*, a lifestyle text originally marketed in early 1987 under the slogan "A Tribute To Black Excellence" and targeted at an upwardly-mobile, urban black South African readership. *Tribute* was for its time an unusual cultural phenomenon, for the most prominent sociocultural logics of the day were militancy and unrest. As Mehlaleng Mosotho explains with a dramatic foreshortening deliberately intended to highlight the anomaly of the magazine's launch, the first issue of *Tribute* appeared

about one-and-a-half years after then-president PW Botha had declared a state of emergency. Apartheid soldiers and policemen were milling about in the townships. Activists were being detained by the thousand. There was also much death. The enemy was not only the apartheid government, but also the capitalist order. (1997:40)

Despite several changes of editor and ownership since its inception, *Tribute* is typified visually by an iconography which circulates the symbolic significance of 'modern', consumer-mediated black South African experiences, and verbally by an editorial environment which attempts to naturalise the complex discursive sets through which a sophisticated, educated and professional black presence might be imagined. (Figures 1.i – 1.iii are included early in the Chapter in order to suggest features of the magazine's design and editorial emphasis, although codes such as these are addressed throughout my discussion.) *Tribute* is doubtless a desirable social vehicle for some South African groups, whether we place advertisers or consumers in the driving seat. Whatever the initial scepticism in 1987 concerning the ability of advertising placement to sustain the magazine, by mid 1996 *Tribute* had secured advertising income to the value of R1,3 million for its August 1996 issue, and according to then-editor S'bu Mngadi, "a publication of *Tribute*'s size and circulation usually sold advertising worth about R600 000 a month" (*Daily News Journalist* 1996:2). Moreover, a glance at the ABC (Audit Bureau of Circulation) figures for January-June 1995 and July-December 1995 (the most recent I have been able to obtain) indicate that *Tribute*'s circulation figures increased over this period by 6.16%. While the official readership of approximately 20 000 is comparatively low, media analysts consider that the increase is consequential for a small, niche market title (Golding-Duffy 1996a:6), and point out that such data is unable to convey the extent of the complicated re-circulations amongst readers to which any single issue is probably subjected. As "a glossy magazine with articles on winetasting and advertisements for Christian Dior", *Tribute* is perceived by some in the media to be a powerful "symbol of black aspiration"; the magazine is reputed to have "seen sales rise 50% in the past three years. S'bu Mngadi, its [then] editor, guesses that about 55% of blacks are now potential readers for him....In short, this is upward mobility as in any society that allows it" (*Sunday Tribune Property Journalist* 1997:6). If figures can suggest anything to the researcher, it is that both advertisers and several thousand South African readers are interested in *Tribute* as a title for the contemporary black South African.

What makes *Tribute* distinctive in its representations of black South African identity? For one thing, the title seems to be claimed by its various editorial teams as diverging from the "sensational crime, violence and sex" journalism which South African cultural analysts have deemed characteristic of print media directed at black South Africans (Tomaselli and Tomaselli 1987:47). Yet this form of challenge does not entail an editorial and copy which can be interpreted according to a conventionally understood political radicalism premised on explicit opposition. Instead, as I explore in this Chapter, the magazine shifts attention to a heterogeneously-imagined 'lifestyle politics', and the role of style, image and symbol in the

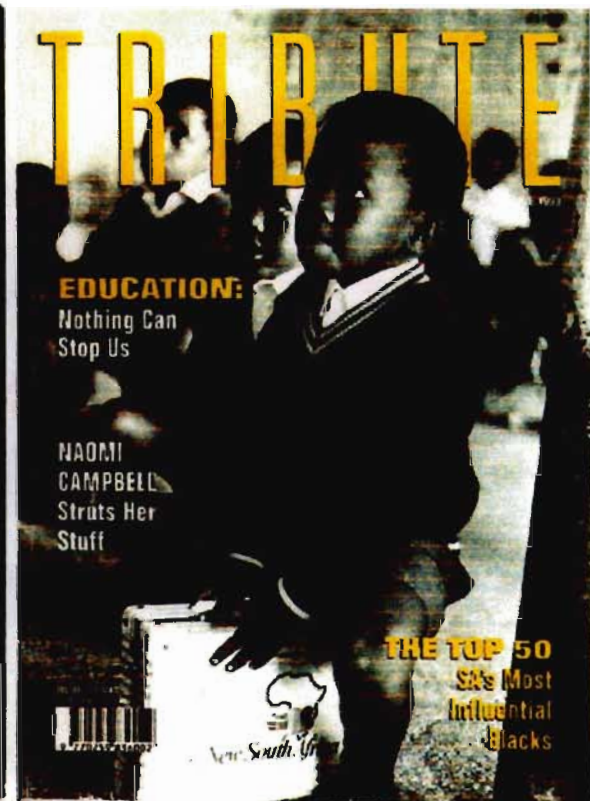
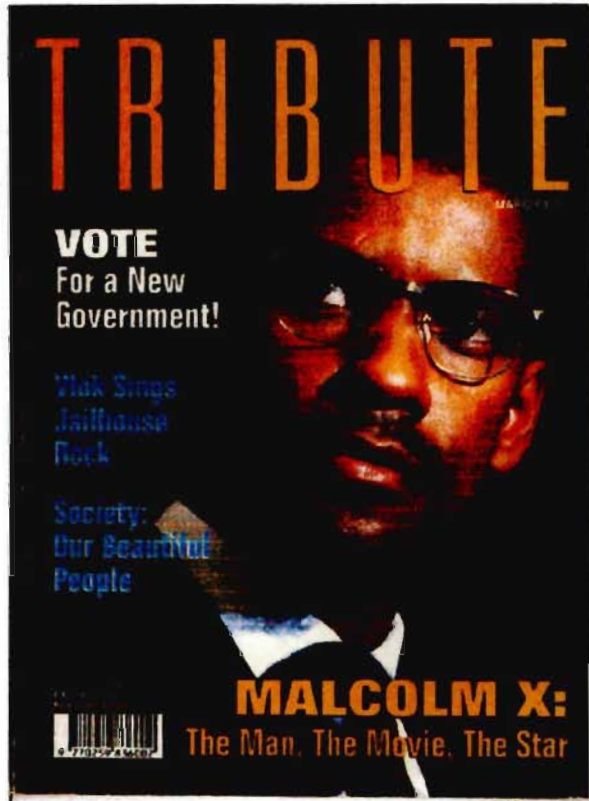
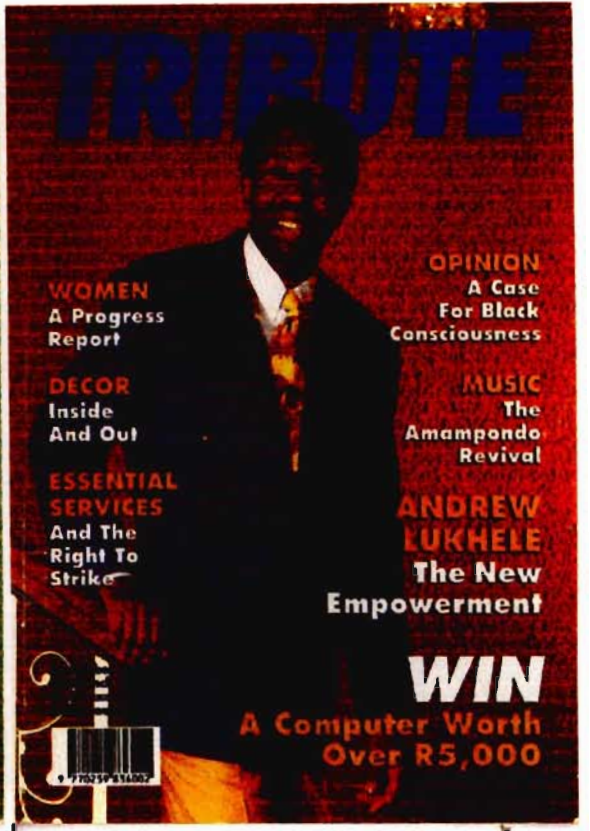
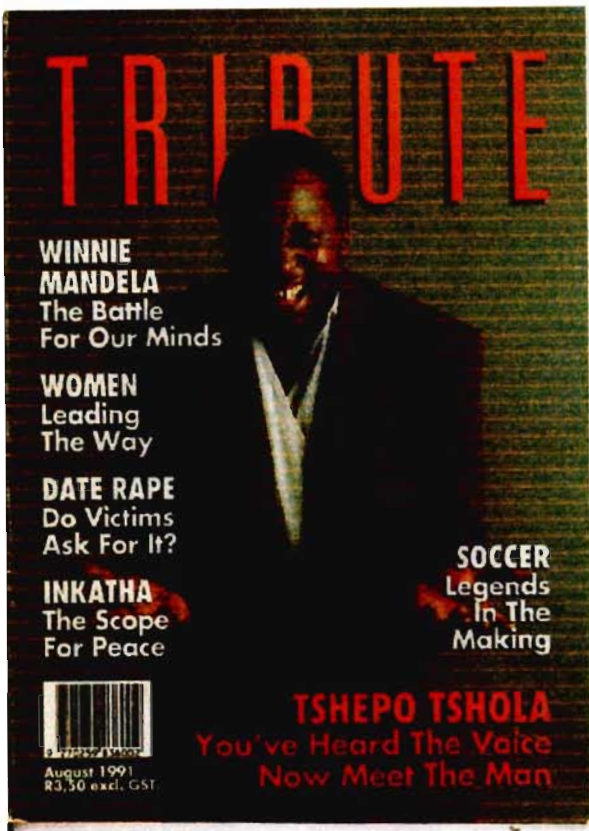


Figure 1.i



Figure 1.ii

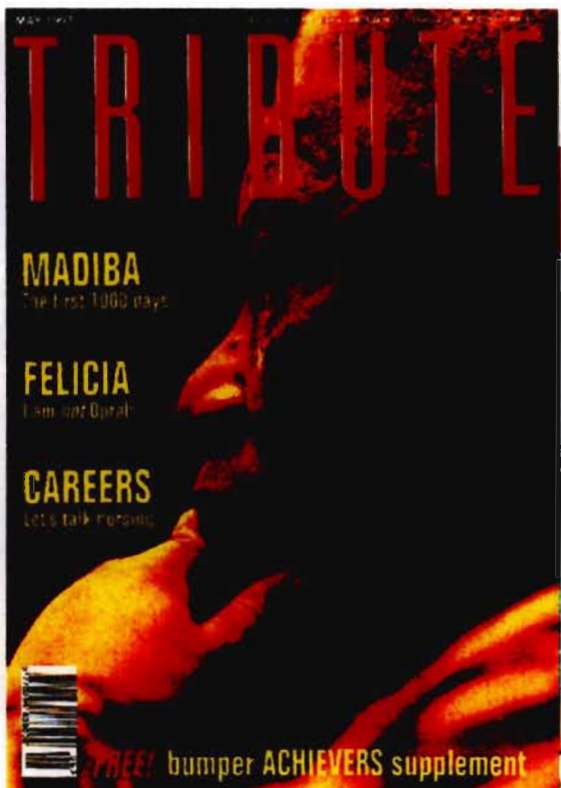
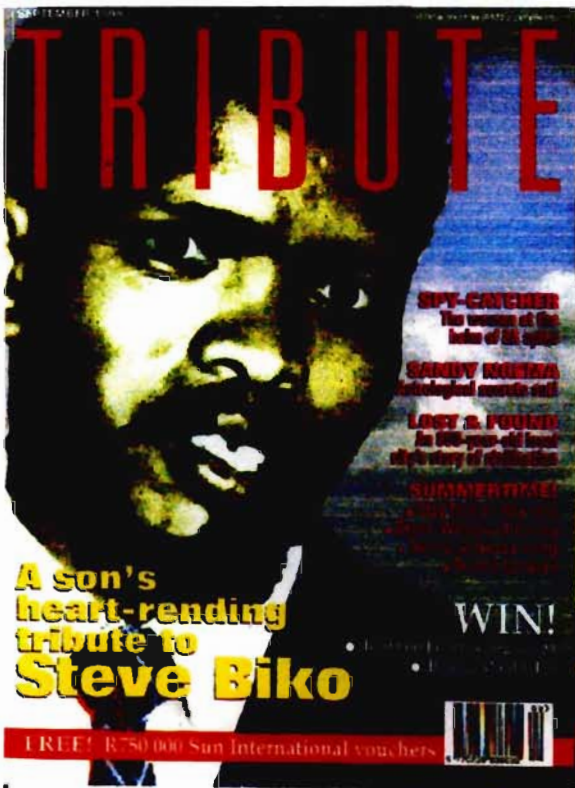
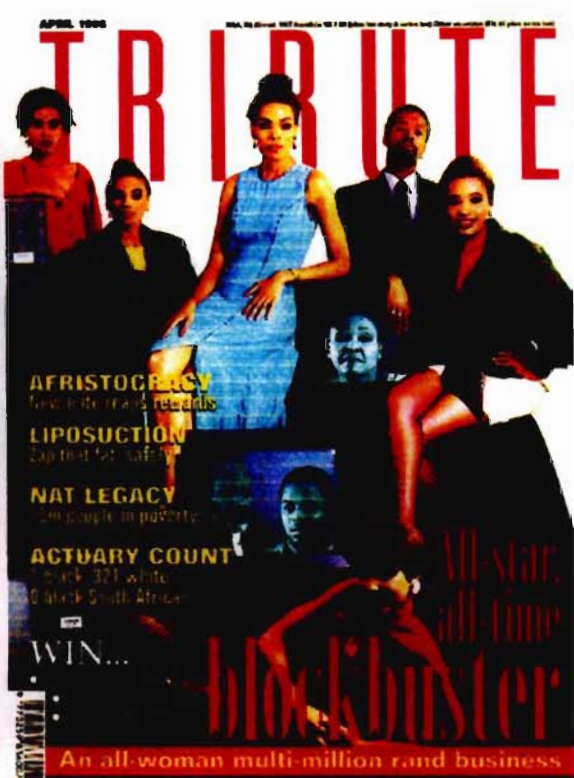
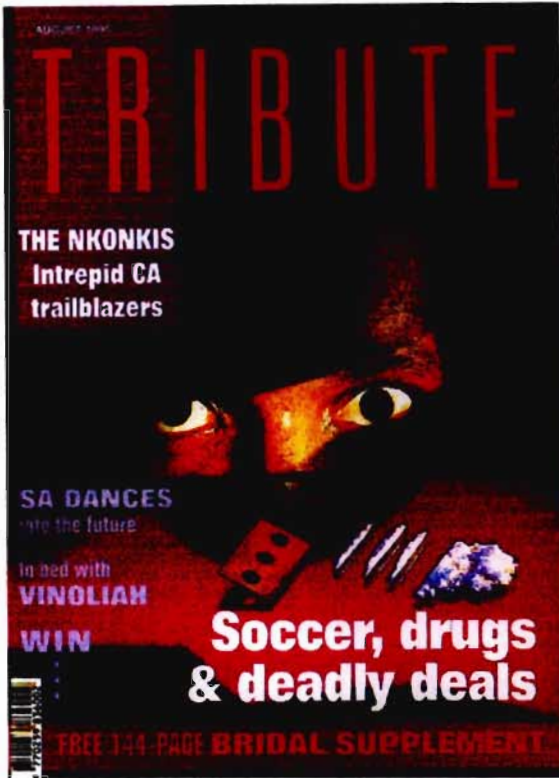


Figure 1.iii

staging of black identities. Perhaps with some of these convoluted South African identity politics in mind, Jon Qwelane, during his first stint as the editor of *Tribute* (1992-1995), was eager to indicate that the new title was not the unsophisticated ‘native rag’ generated by a propagandist apartheid publishing infrastructure which had historically fobbed off black people with ‘bread and circuses’. “*Tribute*...has no equal” he declared

because we will never serve you the kind of patronising rubbish of other magazines – such as *tikoloshes*, *witches*, *sangomas*, *prophets*, and *magic potions* – which insults your intelligence. We do not pander to the widely-held bigoted belief of many publishing houses, which hold that ‘blacks are only interested in sport and sex’. (August 1993:1)

Qwelane is gesturing, I imagine, towards the editorial emphases of magazines such as *Pace*. In some sense, this consumer magazine is marginally similar to *Tribute*, for it also instructs black South Africans in the languages and spectacles of ‘modernity’. Nevertheless, *Pace*’s version of black South African contemporaneity is imagined through more overtly traditional discourses than is *Tribute*’s. Force Kashane, its current editor-in-chief, claims that he *consciously* seeks “to incorporate indigenous tradition and urban culture” into the title. Kashane himself presently “operates as a traditional medicine man outside of office hours” (Laden no date b:23). In order to conceptualise the distinctive brand identity of *Tribute*, we need to understand that it was partly through appeals to ‘tribal tradition’ that apartheid structures sought to manage the modernity of black South Africans, to use their labour in the formation of a modern economy, even while restricting their participation in the development of a contemporary South African society. It is partly in response to this that *Tribute* espouses an often glamorous, professionalised representation of black South Africanness, one that is demonstrated through the status symbols of consumption, and the reasonable, rational imperatives of a proto-Enlightenment discourse which encourages readers towards a critical agency in generating a democratic South Africa. Already, then, we are confronted by the difficulties of placing *Tribute* in the magazine market: how in the South African context are we to reconcile a black racial emphasis with a lifestyle orientation *and* with a political agenda? And, further, how are we to generate this reading from a position within English Studies? At least one answer is provided by my approach in this Chapter: instead of arguing for the title as a means whereby black people are unilaterally co-opted into the uncritical discourses of consumerism, I produce a reading of the magazine that is shaped by the ‘discursive sensibility’ of a contemporary English Studies in which the researcher is sympathetic to symbolic meanings and confused emotional-psychological investments, open to the appeal of images and tropic patternings. While I give an unusual degree of attention, for an English Studies critic, to the politics of *Tribute*’s production, social context and technological infrastructure, I am also cautious, in the time-honoured manner of literary critics, about collapsing the ‘meaning’ of *Tribute* into a simple economic thesis. Rather, in a method suggested to me by Willoughby’s account of the shortcomings in South African cultural criticism (1991), I search out correspondences and distinctions between such a thesis and more circuitous, undervalued forms of rhetorical authority. In magazine production and reception these might be figured, for instance, in management’s attempts to position a text in relation to an implied readership; in a reader’s provisional pleasure in particular textual patternings and symbolic codes; and in subtle textual appeals to a desire that is at once idiosyncratic and imagined to have political consequence.

In carrying out my research, I have tried to avoid the major shortcomings of the few existing studies on the South African print media (the majority of which, at any rate, critique newspaper journalism rather than the periodical press). Tomaselli and Tomaselli, perhaps the most prolific and influential academic commentators on the South African print media, argue that studies on South African print media are flawed in their over-reliance on uncritical categories such as

reminiscence, patriotism, functionalism, or liberalism (1987). I have sought to provide a more 'balanced' account of *Tribute*, yet certain objections might still be made. In comparison to the currently preferred discourses of South African 'cultural studies'-type criticism, for instance, I consider structural constraints and political economy as in themselves insufficient explanatory or definitional devices for either the form of the textual product, or the imagined behaviour of the intended readership. The Tomasellis' analysis in *Narrating the Crisis: Hegemony and the South African Press* (1987) foregrounds political economy, perversely refusing to take seriously their own contention that media texts and contexts ought to be characterised as sites of struggle over meaning. Their preferred version of a grand ideological narrative seems to be that if hegemony is always effected through struggle, it is generally secured, even if only temporarily, to the advantage of the state. Despite the 'narrating' of the title, their work is also noticeably short on forms of critical engagement with examples of text, and they have little time for the complex emotional and symbolic 'mosaic' of human relations which contributes to the meanings which cultural forms and practices may accrue in diverse contexts of use. (Martin Trump makes a similar point in his 1989 review of *Narrating the Crisis*.) In my own discussion of *Tribute*, while I do attempt to situate the magazine within its changing contexts of production, I am undeniably curious about the possible symbolic resonances of content, which I do not regard simply as fundamental indicators of Capital's vested interests. Also, in reconstructing a sense of the magazine's textuality I do not pretend to efface my personal critical voice – whatever its romanticising, liberal-pluralist overtones – in favour of an imagined academic objectivity. My commentary relies as much on the forms of 'reminiscence' and even mis-remembering which inevitably characterise an individual's long-standing reading of a particular magazine as it does on supposed critical distance. Nor, despite its self-reflexivity, is it completely free from the idealising reconstructions of 'black life' which, if we are honest, have been instrumental in white academe's formulating of a black South African subject.

My critical engagement in Chapter 2 with *Tribute* is exploratory rather than definitive. In reading *Tribute* in the academic context (for even the bedside reading of such a magazine tends, for the teacher of English Studies, to be filtered through the lens of critical analysis and research) my inclination has been to invent for the magazine, within the constraints of consumer culture, a number of creative possibilities. As De Certeau (1984) has argued, whatever the unequal distributions of power between 'institutions' and 'individuals' we should not ignore the illimitable strategies, tactics and practices through which people 'invent' their everyday life. Accordingly, I am inclined to consider that *Tribute* unevenly struggles to fashion and to express a cultural identity which intersects with the unstable and loose collectivity of a large body of black (and white) consumers. There is always the possibility that something or someone – 'history'? a yet-to-be-discovered, reliable form of audience research? – may prove some of my critical imaginings wrong. These hypothetical forms of authority may propose, for instance, that *Tribute* in its various manifestations since 1987 intersects less with hybrid discourses of contemporary black South African experience than with the ever-more explicit privileges being claimed by a black elite. Yet the possibility of being misdirected or unable to generate a comprehensively totalised research narrative should not, I believe, inhibit me from seeking to theorise *Tribute*. I am interested in producing a reading of *Tribute* in which I am present through intersecting subjectivities – casual reader, teacher, consciously white South African...as well as through those less analytically-deliberated subject positions which I may have generated for myself. The reader of the Chapter, then, will to an extent be producing the argument even as s/he reads, making visible narratives and idea clusters which the author has not been aware of. Such creative lacunae are as conventional to critical discourse as they are to what is more usually considered to be imaginative,

creative discourse; they are necessarily one mechanism through which intellectual capital is invented. I can but acknowledge that my own critical subjectivity moves awkwardly amongst its never fully controlled constituents, and between the 1987 past of *Tribute's* first issue, and the 1997 present of the magazine's first decade.

What was the prevailing institutional climate in which it seemed important for a research project to engage with cultural forms that articulated *black* South African culture? While we are familiar with the fact that through the 1970s to the 1980s, 'blackness' as a signifier had acquired currency as a sign of political resistance amongst South Africa's oppressed, somewhat less understood is the power which 'progressive' and 'radical' white academics had claimed for 'black' subject matter within a predominantly white academe. 'Black' texts seemed vicariously to legitimate certain forms of teaching and research. As I have already indicated in the Introduction, in a struggle which demanded from white South Africans of oppositional political orientation some explicit commitment to change, it helped, for instance, to conceive of one's intellectual activity as the giving of voice to previously silenced or marginalised areas of experience. Thus many of us may have 'felt better' (more in touch? more politically correct? more useful as academics?) to have been working on black women's writing, on trade union plays, on protest poetry, rather than on the figures of either the English or the more recent South African canon. Whatever its oblique corroboration of apartheid labels, then, the emphasis on race as a definitional marker garnered more institutional approval than did a concern with seeking to investigate sympathetically the co-opted images of a white-dominated South African media apparatus. My impulses to research *Tribute*, therefore, were unevenly both contained by and transgressive of the prevailing boundaries of English Studies. In the early 1990s I turned to a text which was at once in and out of place within my discipline.¹

In one sense, especially if interpreted along an axis which emphasised race, it was beginning to 'belong'. The efforts of many literary-critical scholars since at least the 1970s had resulted in the institutionalisation of a local, South African counter-canon fundamental to which were black writers and theorists, despite the continuing conviction of some literary traditionalists that the work of these figures was 'poorly achieved' or perhaps 'slight'. Thus poets like Siphosiphiso Sepamla and Wally Serote, and writers of fiction such as Mtutuzeli Matshoba and Miriam Tlali, were studied in some South African English departments alongside figures like Shakespeare, the Romantics, Eliot (and the local 'modernist metaphysical' poet Douglas Livingstone).

In another sense, however, *Tribute* was an institutional outsider: if the magazine at least possessed a desirable, politically-correct black racial quotient, this was articulated in conjunction with a middle class lifestyle orientation which, particularly through its association with white South African economic privilege, had come to connote bourgeois consumerism and rampant capitalist individualism. For many academics of the 1970s and 1980s, a black ontology seems to have been synonymous with collectivity, testimony, suffering and resilience. While it is to a financially comfortable, ostensibly naturalised middle class imaginary that so many South Africans understandably aspire, black people who in different ways subscribed to the category middle class have regularly been spurned as sell-outs and assimilated apoliticals; the inauthentic, brain-whitewashed victims of false-consciousness. This is one of the repercussions, I would think, of an emphatically collectivist model (or myth) of 'black life': it is ill-equipped to conceptualise the often equivocal allegiances of black people who display an aggressive individualism or commitment to stylish consumption, alongside the more conventional, expected commitment to political change and the bolstering of community. Thus *Tribute* was probably, for some in the literary field, too-obviously a cultural product of a demonised consumerism to be worthy of close study. For critics of left persuasion, many of whom might already have begun to argue the case

for forms of black South African culture, *Tribute*'s alleged imitation of dominant 'white' cultural norms would have delegitimated its claim to be a relevant form of 'popular' black culture. Although they do not refer to *Tribute per se*, Tomaselli and Tomaselli, for example, argue that black newspaper journalism was merely incorporated into dominant white political power, toeing the line of "conciliatory policies" towards apartheid capitalism (1987:52).

In trying to comprehend such responses to forms of mass culture, we must recollect that much of the energy behind the claims for black agency and presence made during the 1970s and early 1980s had derived not solely from a racial or even national South African agenda, but from Marxist-influenced challenges to a status quo which was perceived to be founded on economic oppression. Despite the burgeoning interest in 'black life' and 'black writing' during the 1970s, then, there prevailed a distinction between 'popular' and 'mass' cultural forms. The latter signified the alienated, commercial, soporific pleasures of an Americanised culture industry, while the former designated the authentic cultural expression of a hitherto voiceless black constituency, often further enunciated as 'working class', peasant and/or female.

Such polarised labelling, however, has not proved useful. In part, I have been obliged, in working on *Tribute*, to struggle towards an appropriately difficult response to one of those disingenuous questions posed at literary-cultural conferences: "Why are you, a white academic, looking at a black consumer magazine?". Interestingly, despite my individual critical repertoire having been influenced by cultural theory's challenges to reductive notions of mass manipulation and commodity fetishism, I only belated understood that *Tribute* sat uneasily in relation to the conceptually privileged 'popular' and 'resistant' to which progressive critics had tended to have recourse in making the case for black South African forms of cultural expression. In one way, *Tribute* seemed to invite interpretation as a form of the resistant black popular culture that had been occulted under apartheid, and had struggled to define itself against a prevailing sociocultural establishment. Yet when I read the magazine through another critical filter, notions of clearcut resistance and homogeneous blackness were as often problematised as invoked in the magazine: outspoken criticism of injustice sat alongside praise for individual corporate-cultural success; the audience was addressed sometimes in its all-embracing capacity as 'the people' (a collectively oppressed, subordinated majority), and at others in a guise resembling that of the organic intellectual (Gramsci 1971), a professional class capable of guiding into being a non-racial, democratic ideal. What has become clearer to me through my reading of *Tribute* is that 'popular culture' is not self-evidently a form, or collation of forms, which exists at a remove from an ideologically, institutionally dominant consumer culture.

***Tribute*: A Partial History**

In providing a better sense of *Tribute* magazine's history, I concentrate on the original Enosi publishing house rather than generating a complete chronicle of the changes in ownership from Enosi to Penta to Times Media Limited and Independent Newspapers.² With an intended audience of people who were, or envisaged themselves to be, members of a black South African middle class, *Tribute* was launched in February 1987 by independent Sandton publisher Greg Psillos, managing director of Enosi Publications. No doubt Psillos's motives *were* economic: publishing is first and foremost a *business* (Braithwaite and Barrell 1988). Within what was at the time the cash-rich context of South African magazine publishing, there was much scope for the launch of new titles, since advertisers were recovering from their ten-year infatuation with television, and rediscovering the ability of the magazine form to address a precise audience. Although niche marketing has brought about some changes in strategy, the advertising and media industries have tended to target their products and services by conceptualising individuals as situated within

broad income bands – A, B and C earners – and *Tribute* readers were probably imagined as A/B identities indicative of middle class affiliation; thought to possess some completed formal education and fairly high degrees of surplus capital which would enable them to buy particular kinds of commodities and, indeed, ‘to buy into’ the very spectacle of consumption. Yet *Tribute*’s particular audience was in many ways an oxymoron. Despite apartheid doctrines (which had sought to preclude the accumulation of black wealth and hence to give the lie to the formation of significant black purchasing power beyond the level of need), middle class consumption occurred in marginal pockets of black South African life, and was also potentially everywhere, since urban Africans possessed a collective consumer power that entrepreneurs were anxious both to tap and to manufacture.

Like his intended readership, *Tribute*’s publisher, too, was considered something of a ‘mystery-man’ in the local publishing industry. (I am not concerned with the matter of Psillos’s ‘personality’, although Mosotho’s article suggests that he was regarded as an eccentric whose “favourite language was money” [1997:38].) A “Greek businessman who had made money as a brick merchant before turning his attention to publishing” (Mosotho 1997:38), Psillos was not only an independent but, unlike the established publishing institutions Nasionale Pers (National Press), Republican and CTP/Caxton, he was a publisher who owned neither printing press nor distribution network, and therefore should not have been able to function. Indeed, Psillos’s very existence was an insult to some journalistic purists because with *Living* he pioneered the giveaway glossy, kept afloat by virtue of a substantial advertising expenditure. *Living* was the flagship of his publishing empire and this financed its dramatic expansion. The Enosi titles were originally planned from a residential plot near Hyde Park in Johannesburg: “*Living*, a magazine aimed at the mink and manure English readership, was run from the main house. *De Kat*, a magazine targeted at affluent Afrikaans jet-setters, churned out several issues from a cottage on the property” and in September 1996, after Psillos had been persuaded by advertising professional Judy Henshall to back a new black title, “a large caravan was hauled on site to house a third magazine – *Tribute*” (Mosotho 1997:38). This idiosyncratic, ‘down-home’ operational method was considered highly irregular in the centralised political economy of South African publishing. Soon after *Tribute*’s launch, Psillos went more visibly upmarket, acquiring premises for Enosi publishing in a stylish office block in Rosebank. “The building was called Enosi Place. Psillos’s company was the anchor tenant, giving him leverage to fly his flag. He was known to be good at that sort of cut and thrust, gaining leverage and doing better deals” (Mosotho 1997:38).

There is little doubt, then, that *Tribute* was first and foremost a business venture, and that it was launched into a racially-segmented South African magazine market by a white magazine empire which had been built on the proceeds of a glossy, consumer title distributed free to residents of upper-income, white English-speaking areas. For some South African cultural critics these grounds, in conjunction with the fact of white capital investing in a so-called black title, would be sufficient on which to condemn the magazine: as in the case of the South African ‘black’ press more broadly, the title would probably be understood as merely a medium for white capital, rather than as a “truly independent ‘black’ press” and an “alternative media” channel (Tomaselli and Tomaselli 1987:46). The central thesis in criticisms such as this seems to be that opposition and radicalism are the primary subjectivities envisaged for black South Africans under apartheid and that these can only be authentic (indeed can only be thought to exist) if they are independent of the status quo.

Any analysis of *Tribute* does need to admit that the magazine could not simply slough off the received limitations of a South African context. *Tribute*’s capitalising on the linguistically segmented niche-marketing strategy established by *Living* and *De Kat* had precursors in apartheid

publishing, where separate texts had long been printed for separate races. Phil Page snidely remarks, for instance, that the slogan adopted for the early issues of *Tribute* ('A Tribute to Black Excellence') "defiantly [confined the magazine]...to a Group Area of ethnic aspiration" (1987:31). My own purpose in this Chapter, though, is to suggest that inherited apartheid divisions were not beyond being recast. The class position of an envisaged *Tribute* readership, similarly, is susceptible to creative theorising. The fact that the three Penta titles shared a middle class brand identity could be said to have implied that despite variations in racial and linguistic idioms black and white South Africans might share moments of commonality; these were actual or aspirational class affiliations which thwarted conventional South African boundaries.

Given the lifestyle orientation of the magazine, however, none of this is necessarily self-evident. As Mosotho wryly observes in his retrospective piece for the magazine's ten year celebration, it was initially envisaged by the publisher that in *Tribute* there "would be a lot of society pages, where blacks would be shown wining and dining, decked out in evening wear, quaffing expensive wine and talking glibly about raking in the millions. *Tribute* would be a lifestyle magazine, avoiding the troublesome clutter of things political" (1997:38). Yet while *Tribute* was not declaratively oppositional, it is also the case that if Psillos wished to succeed as a publisher, he needed to conceptualise his project in keeping with those contemporaneous discourses which exerted a persuasive power over the subjectivities of the readership he hoped to secure, and these were what we conventionally designate political as well as consumerist. However cynical the underlying motive in launching *Tribute*, for instance, there were clear attempts by Psillos to develop for the new black title a signature which announced seriousness and challenge rather than 'mere' glossy frivolity; political engagement rather than 'mere' lifestyle. I shall pursue this in relation to two matters: (a) Psillos's search for a founding editor and (b) the strategic attempt to make lifestyle intersect with politically correct agendas.

Psillos first approached Aggrey Klaaste, who was then assistant editor of *The Sowetan* newspaper; the subsequent turn was to Jon Qwelane, a senior journalist at *The Star*. Both men were willing to write for the new magazine but, being "on the rise in major publications with a secure future" (Mosotho 1997:39), were understandably reluctant to risk their established careers on the editorship of an unknown periodical. By the time of the proposed launch date, Psillos "had scouted all of South Africa looking for a senior black male journalist...[but] they had all worked too hard for their careers and reputations to put them on the line for a glossy magazine for blacks born at the wrong political time" (Motanyane 1997:20).

Psillos's preference for an editor who was senior and black is almost self-explanatory. If one looks at the range of magazines (and indeed newspapers) published for black South Africans by white-owned capital, race and seniority had become more or less conventional credibility criteria. White capital needed to be fronted by visible black management in order to develop the necessary 'relationship' which the periodical form had come to seek with its target audience. Klaaste and Qwelane were journalists who also combined other desirable features. Each man had developed a familiar, and hence *marketable* writing style, which was nevertheless expressive of an ideology *oppositional* to apartheid. Thus either might have stamped Psillos's new publication with a measure of immediate credibility: advertisers' confidence would have been bolstered, and readers' curiosity in and potential commitment to the title would probably have been prodded.

Slightly more interesting with regard to Psillos's search is the matter of gender. With the launch date of the first issue of *Tribute* imminent, and no senior black male journalist having accepted the editorial position, Psillos was driven to take on as editor Maud Motanyane, a black female journalist who had joined the new title "to write and help farm out articles for the first issue" (Mosotho 1997:39). In offering her expertise, Motanyane argued that since she had "been

the back-room girl for the previous six months,” she might as well “put the magazine to bed” (1997:20). Although it is difficult to attribute intentionality here – Motanyane may well be using a form of feminist reverse discourse – the metaphors foreground the discourses through which even professional women attempt to manage their ‘female’ behaviour: these range from a capacity for nurturing, to hard work, self-effacement, responsibility and creativity; and they are ambiguously both maternal and sexual.

I have no data to prove the suggestion that Psillos was deliberately searching for a black *male* editor in order to signpost *Tribute*’s social significance and status. (Some might argue that apartheid structures and capitalism’s glass-ceiling had created a dearth of potential black female candidates; but there existed at the time a number of impressive black women journalists, some of whom, like Lizeka Mda, have gone on to work for *Tribute* in editorial capacities.) This is speculation, but given the political economy of the South African magazine publishing industry, I suspect that the danger for Psillos lay in the possibility that a female founding editor might erroneously have signposted *Tribute* as a general interest *women*’s magazine, rather than a niche title imagined primarily in terms of black middle class lifestyle. Such a misrepresentation could have led to a dramatic fall in advertising revenue subsequent to the initial launch, as well as to confusion amongst readers. As Chapter 3 indicates, moreover, there had been a longstanding tendency to affix the signifiers of style, glamour and consumption – and hence triviality – to magazines published for women. In a forum on black women’s writing and reading conducted in 1990, one participant clearly envisages *Tribute* as a women’s magazine, and therefore deserving of scorn, despite the fact that *Tribute* was not launched as a black female title (Daymond and Lenta 1990). A ‘lifestyle’ orientation, it seems, has tended to be negatively recuperated as female.

No doubt *Tribute* is intertextual with the genre of ‘the women’s magazine’, whether we look at issues from the late 1980s, the early 1990s, or the present. The magazine carries regulars such as fashion, family affairs, beauty options and decor, all of which categories have attracted particular attention from cultural commentators for their role in the popular construction and monitoring of a female subjectivity. Yet the magazine also carries the characteristic features of the consumer title more loosely understood: society, people, careers, motoring, personal finance, lifestyle..., and the editorial ambience is not self-consciously female. Both the poetry pages and the letters to the editor, for example, carry contributions which are as often from men as from women, whereas the male correspondent remains the exception in those titles which are marketed as *women*’s texts. Certainly, an individual article, profile, cover, editorial or even issue might showcase black female success, as Qwelane’s editorial of late 1993 makes clear: “In this issue we salute the pioneering women of our age...We are confident that each of South Africa’s millions of women – our mothers, sisters, aunts, mentors, wives, friends – will see a bit of themselves in the women in these pages” (October 1993:1). Or a feature may focus on the continuing difficulties experienced by black women in the face of economic and legal discrimination. But even the features on fashion and looking good regularly assume that a contemporary black masculinity is as concerned as its female counterpart to construct itself through the ‘modern’ discourses of style, health, hygiene and image which are presented as being less restraining cultural regimens than creative resource. In *Tribute* generally, models are black males and females; products are those for men and women. Similarly, if one of the annual *Tribute* supplements for 1997 carries the title **Bride & Home** (my emphasis), the editor explicitly addresses a readership comprising both men and women, assuming that both require advice about the legal, financial and psychological aspects of various forms of marriage (‘western’ and ‘traditional’), as well as advice about etiquette, home-owning, and decor trends.³

The Launch Issue and the Launch of Critical Attack

If women (and men) laboured in behind-the-scenes pre-production at the *Tribute* offices, and Maud Motanyane came only by force of circumstances to be nominated as editor in the credits column of the launch issue, the cover of the first *Tribute* featured a woman as an unmistakable metonym for black attractiveness and achievement. (Figure 2.) Within the South African periodical press, Innocentia Moephuli was a familiar female face; an award-winning young model with a successful career noteworthy for having been established in shoots commissioned by both black and white consumer magazines. Thus while the cover image may on the one hand be interpreted as the paradoxically exceptional and marginal form of womanhood that is the fashion icon, on the other it is interesting to consider that Moephuli represented visible black success within a predominantly white and white-owned South African commodity industry. She was without doubt to be looked at. To be noticed. Yet she was able to be seen not merely as an individual, but as emblematically representative of a group of black people whose identities were being self-consciously shaped by the highly visible discourses of style, look, consumption and display through which she had fashioned a career.

Thus while the first *Tribute* cover was in some sense inter-referential with the codes of 'cover girl' and 'beauty' familiar to readers from women's magazines, these were also able to be glossed through the bodily manifestations of professional black style. Although, in Chapter 2, I take issue with the assumption that women's magazines are inherently trivial forms, Moephuli's image surely counters a number of criticisms that have been levelled against the women's magazine genre. Her look is less sexually alluring (or vulnerable or even supine) than arrogant; less charmingly frank (or happily satisfied) than supercilious. The face does not uncritically reproduce familiar photographic conventions for the representing of the idealised female face, but interrogates them through a gaze that invites interpretation precisely on account of appearing inscrutable. She appears to disdain the discourses through which she is being constructed even as she turns them to inventive use in the service of self-confident black identity. Of course I am being critically creative here, but it is difficult for me, as a person versed in the languages of South African literary cultural criticism, to 'read' this cover image as being altogether different from the challenges made to a South African literary establishment by the literature of Black Consciousness. If Serote's so-called 'Soweto poem' demanded that readers graphically consider "What's in this black 'shit'?" (Serote 1972), Moephuli's pose poses one kind of answer. She is both icon and iconoclast, displaying style and sardonic style, and 'madamly' and 'masterly' mimicry. The image is difficult to dismiss as mere monologic echo of the official registers of a racist-capitalist culture industry.

At the time, however, this was not the kind of answer that many considered appropriate and *Tribute*'s launch cover, unsurprisingly, was not thought to fall within the parameters of resistant black culture. This is true whether these are envisaged as 'popular' or 'mass'; as deriving from a variety of ideologically contradictory origins such as worker movements, or from political groups like the ANC or the Mass Democratic Movement. Neither leading trade unionist Cyril Ramaphosa nor Winnie Mandela wanted anything to do with *Tribute* when it was launched, associating the title with areas of black life detrimental to the struggle.

Some commentators in the progressive media felt that Moephuli's image looked merely towards black pride rather than towards more radical politics. As Page puts it: *Tribute* is a "new black lifestyle magazine [which] seeks to pay tribute to the face rather than the fist, to black pride rather than Black Consciousness", and thus on the cover "we find ourselves being stared at by a model with her hair fixed in a high royal turban, her eyes fixed in a fiery blush of gold and

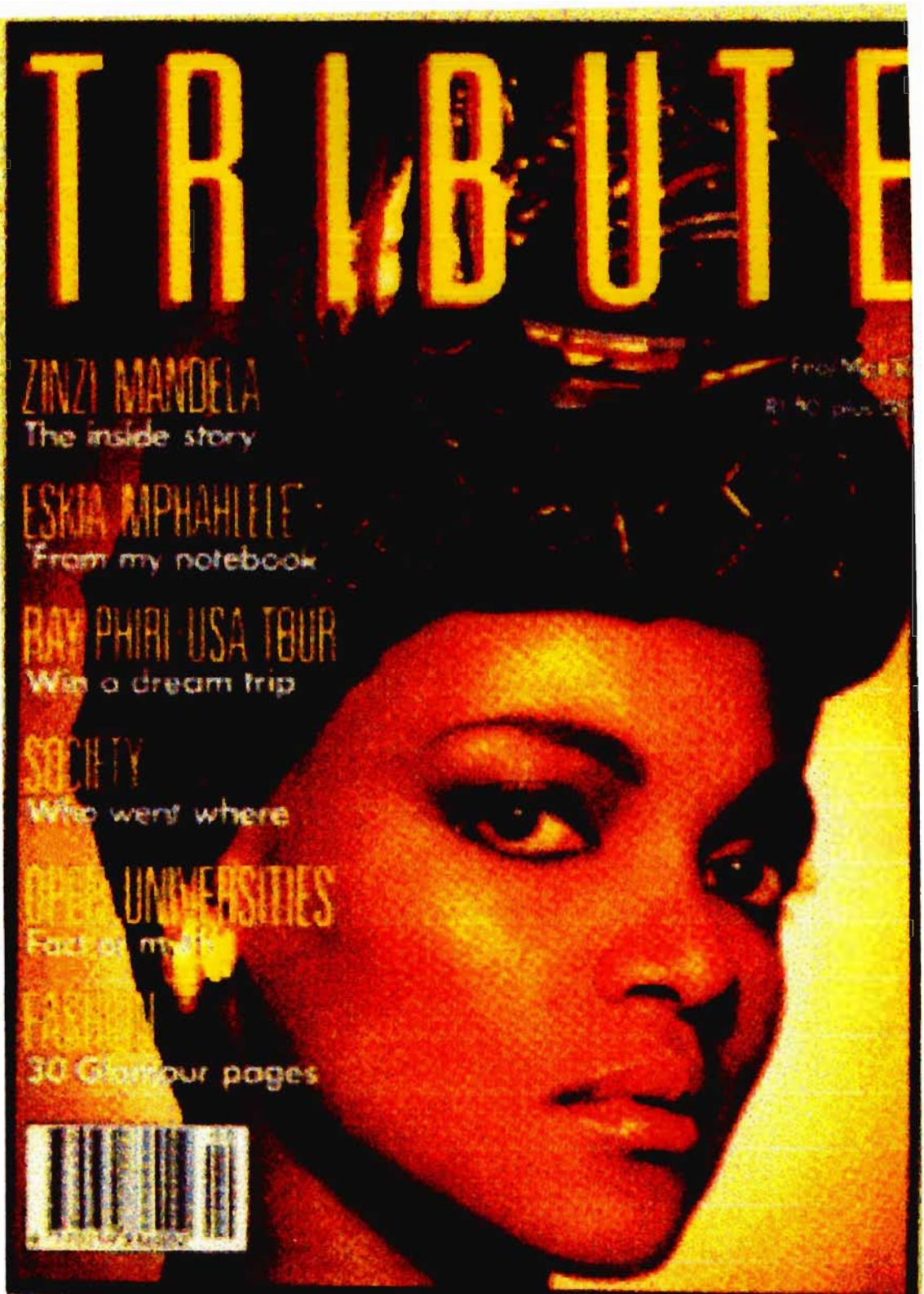


Figure 2

copper" (1987:31). He chooses, here, to parody the elaborate styling descriptions which habitually accompany the images of a fashion shoot, and which purport linguistically to categorise for the viewer what are the infinitely proliferating codes of pseudo-novelty and trend through which modernity is simulated. But he fails to acknowledge a transgressive element, which provokes the viewer to read the image as potentially cognate with the strategic valorisations of Mother Africa effected by Black Consciousness. In making such claims for 'style', we would do well to take Nava's reminder that style is not inherently a vacuous category of human experience. For instance, "the politics of style" as it emerged in the late 1960s was expressly connected to the reworking of "the dominant ethos of consumerism and propriety" by feminists, socialists and black people more broadly. With the rise of Black Consciousness, for example, Afro haircuts were the visible symbol of a black American political consciousness and the search for radical bodily definitions of blackness (Nava 1987:205). The image is not inherently superficial, then, but is implicated in an effort to develop an assertive, self-affirming aesthetic.⁴ The range of this cultural reference might be a reminder to us that style, increasingly acknowledged by sociologists as a significant component in personal and cultural identity, is fashioned from a shifting discursivity that brings disparate categories into temporary local, regional and global conjuncture.

The cover lines of the initial issue were "ZINZI MANDELA: The inside story"; "ES'KIA MPHAHLELE: From my notebook"; "RAY PHIRI – USA TOUR: Win a dream trip" (a competition in association with a popular South African musician); "SOCIETY: Who went where"; "OPEN UNIVERSITIES: Fact or Myth?", and "FASHION: 30 Glamour pages". While the content is *not* easy to categorise, some detractors responded cynically to the new title. Page, for example, mockingly implicates the cover image in the editor's assertion that it "is important for our children and ourselves that we create positive images that will propel us forward" (1987:31). He ironises the credibility of such idealism by 'illustrating' that in the pages of the magazine we are given only positive images of the most expedient kind

positive images of golden brandy and sparkling Spumante, and high silver heels and hot red sports cars. Here are black lawyers and black doctors and black admen and black pilots and black professors: they are all excellent and they all deserve Tribute, but do any of them live in South Africa? And if so, which South Africa? Of course, the one that comes FREE with the Handy Andy. (1987:31)

Disregarding any critical quotient in or function of the magazine, he relentlessly enumerates commodities, and by implication criticises the reification of human achievement into symbolic 'style' and 'success'. He emphasises what he considers to be a superficial and elitist tendency in the magazine: its promoting of a consumer lifestyle which allows some black people to refuse the 'real' South Africa, and at best to harness in the service of consumer gratification the desire for those more authentic, political liberations which were denied to black South Africans by law. I am not about to dismiss Page's points wholesale, particularly since the well-read critic may situate them within a postcolonial cultural critique which has seen as its mission the need to explain the dubious role played by the commodity in the securing of colonial subjectivity. Anne McClintock, for her part, argues that it was through commodity imperialism that nations like Britain in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries sought to misrepresent conquest as progress, and to convince their African subjects to equate consumption with the entry of 'Africa' into 'the modern' (1995). Read through such a theoretical filter, Page's comments usefully draw attention to some of the anomalies which characterise *Tribute*, most obvious among them being an aspirational black identity which is curiously thought to encompass both pleasure in consumption and 'progressive' sociocultural purpose. Yet it is still the anomalies, rather than any coherently conspicuous consumption, which I maintain require critical interpretation.

Several critics have responded to *Tribute* in registers similar to Page's, stressing at once the 'elitist' aspect of the text, and its unsettling conceptualising of black identities in relation to forms of conspicuous consumption. Although the magazine has not, in fact, been given much academic attention, it seems reasonable to expect that *Tribute* would be included as part of a

strategy of fostering a relatively privileged black sector [which] represents an attempt to co-opt it into a collaboration with white capital. This collaboration would be based on its relatively advantaged position with respect to the broad mass of the black population, who are excluded from well paid and permanent employment opportunities, or who are subject to geographic segregation and economic repression. (Tomaselli and Tomaselli 1987:45)

Wicomb refers directly to *Tribute* in addressing the construction of 'the popular' and the imagining of national identities (1991). She explains that we (by whom she presumably means those critics interested in theorising the production and consumption of South African culture) "can no longer ignore popular cultural fusions or the obvious hybridizations popularized through the new media networks. The technological revolution has given all cultures an internationalist aspect" (1991:250). She goes on to claim that "conservative forces have drawn on this aspect to forge the popular culture as represented, for instance, on television or syndicated magazines from *True Love* to *Tribute*" (1991:250), implying that such cultural products are detrimental in being derived from the Culture Industry's peddling of mass deception disguised as enlightenment. In contradistinction to this conservative cultural function, she maintains, a radical culture would take upon itself a different set of tasks. She is not so foolish as to equate radical cultural engagement with the pursuit of authenticity – *real, true, pure* (South) African identities – yet her argument is redolent of a narrowly political, zealously coherent sense of cultural mission which is at odds both with the mandates of magazines such as *Tribute*, and with the refractory 'logics' of consumer culture more broadly. As Wicomb sees it: "a radical culture would engage with...representations [such as those in *Tribute*], expose the poverty in their glossy images of the corporate black, intervene in their presentation, and *re-present* in ways that explore and challenge power relations" (1991:250). The language, here, clearly enunciates a unidirectional and omniscient Power, whether it is envisaged as Capital and/or The Critic. For Wicomb, surface meanings are by definition superficial and morally reprehensible such that beneath the flayed skin will be 'exposed' for the self's regard an authentic, proper cultural body. When would this self truly recognise itself, I am given to wonder? Would it in having been made more 'selfless' – less like its self and more susceptible to critical discipline – become the real self? To speak less figuratively: at least one of my difficulties is Wicomb's unwillingness to allow that whatever its origins in the quagmire of capitalist entrepreneurship, a cultural product can in practice escape the bounds of its economic inscription. Similarly, it is not necessarily in the systems of criticism that the meanings of consumer culture will be demonstrated. Wicomb is unable to grant that the texts and practices of consumer culture may, whatever their apparently superficial meanings, speak to deeply-felt, historically-specific needs and fears.

Admittedly, this line of research remains comparatively underdeveloped. Even were we to limit ourselves to that body of cultural theory that has begun to filter into South African English Studies, though, we might recognise that if *Tribute* has inevitably been vectored into commodity consumption (and into the consumption by black people of new rhetorics of black corporate empowerment), it does not hold that consumption is by definition morally impoverished, or that reification works to the exclusion of heterotopic longings. Nor need it be the case that an editorial mandate, in the hands of several different editors, precludes a strategic, even critical intervention in the power relations characterising 'the status quo'.

Let it be said that Wicomb is far from alone in responding as she does to the field of mass South African culture in which *Tribute* lies: sociopolitical exigencies of the mid to late 1980s

pressured cultural critics into taking what now seem to be doctrinaire positions. In trying to establish a more detailed sense of how the consumerist discourses of *Tribute* have led to the magazine's being considered an inappropriate form of black South African culture, it is also useful to turn to the arguments of the South African cultural critic (and poet) Karen Press in her article "Building a National Culture in South Africa" (1990). What becomes evident in the essay is that while Press initially appears to make a case precisely for the kind of popular, mass-mediated black cultural forms through which *Tribute* is usefully to be understood, she subsequently restricts the 'relevantly popular' to only those kinds of mass and consumer culture that she regards as being 'organically' derived from the experiences of a black *working* class. Making a considered case for indigenous cultural expression in relation to the formation of a national culture, Press argues that "the lifestyle and cultural habits of a society should grow out of its own history and present needs, rather than aping an inappropriate model imported from elsewhere" (1990:29). Despite the connotations of her organicist and evolutionist metaphor, though, Press is nevertheless open to a new South African national culture that is hybrid rather than overtly or traditionally indigenous. This liberatory culture

must begin with the raw materials of existing 'popular culture' amongst the masses. This culture is composed of a host of traditions, indigenous and imported; in South Africa, one could name anything ranging from traditional marriage and funeral ceremonies amongst the various religious communities... to the many social customs focussed on the home brewing of beer (from the rural beer-drink with its accompaniment of African songs, to the urban shebeen, with its similarities to American jazz subculture), to the Michael Jackson-lookalike competition amongst urban teenagers. (1990:30)

Press draws on Cabral (1980:146) in order to theorise a belief that any meaningful national identity will be syncretic and constantly negotiated, rather than ever absolutely achieved. *Tribute* would seem to fit well into such a conceptual scheme (notwithstanding that 'the national' is an increasingly phantasmagorical form of community in an age of globally-mediated images). But Press then dramatically narrows the possible criteria through which 'relevant' cultural agency may be imagined. Once again using Cabral, she argues that it is the *positive* aspects of these varied traditions which must be drawn on in the process of building a national culture. She uses 'positive' to mean something that "does not perpetuate values of inequality (gender or racial), individualism, greed, etc" (1990:30). This may in many ways be an admirable and desirable ideal, but it is unlikely to allow real space to the ambivalent texts and practices of consumer culture. Considered even at the level of meaningful self identity, it does not seem to grant the vested interests which individuals have in fashioning their 'selves'.

In an endnote to her paper, Press insistently reiterates the primacy of an *oppressive class* dimension in the racial-cultural subordination of South African black people, remarking that there has always been a small proportion of the black population which has embraced the Anglocentric culture of the missionaries and the liberal white community, hoping in this way to attain the 'civilized' status of whites, and thereby gain access to political power. Today, there is a growing black middle class which embraces whole-heartedly the values and lifestyle of American corporate culture (the Soweto yuppies...), as a brief perusal of any issue of *Tribute* magazine will confirm. It remains the working class (rural and urban) which suffers most severely under the culture of imperialism of the ruling class. (1990:40)

I do not wish, at this point, to take up Press's observations concerning a culturally (and by implication ideologically) assimilated black elite as I return to such matters later in this Chapter in a discussion of *Tribute*'s distinctive literary discourses. For the moment, two points throw doubt upon some of Press's claims. Firstly, and as Press herself indicates, the "small proportion" of black people influenced by so-called western culture is increasingly a "growing black middle class"; this implies that distinctions between authentic and inauthentic cultures, if they ever were appropriate, are being rendered less tenable. Secondly, class formation is unlikely ever to entail

an unproblematically complete ‘embracing’ of a single body of cultural meaning and practices, whether missionised Anglocentric liberalism or American corporatism.

As I argue in this Chapter, a magazine like *Tribute* is shot through with all manner of contradictions: now espousing equality, now praising the distinctive voice and style; now advocating an ideational collective African spirit of community sharing and *ubuntu*, and now hoping to inspire individual achievement in the manner of corporate noteworthiness. There is no place for such ideological-emotional volatility in Press’s view of a progressive national agenda.

Press’s argument is perhaps understandably contradictory in trying to theorise South African contemporary culture. She is motivated by a desire to ‘preserve’ something that is authentically South African (or even more specifically *black* South African?), perhaps because this ‘authenticity’ is believed to be the distinctive marker of a new South African national identity. Yet at the same time she needs to admit the volatile nature of both culture and nationalism in the awkward interlocations of local and global, and the unstable discursivity of categories such as class. Overall, Press seeks to manage cultural contradiction with recourse to the authenticity of a working class: her article implies that she is (or wishes to be?) secure in believing that cultural agency should be most valued when emanating from those oppressed by capital. This position does not allow for the cross-currents of identification and affiliation which characterise people’s imagined class positions. It is uncomfortable with the fact that cultural identification is riven with refracted and refractory allegiances and imaginative investments, as well as being characterised by a creative intervention in the cultural discourses through which subjectivity is being negotiated. In his volume on commodification, consumption and cleanliness in modern Zimbabwe, for instance, Timothy Burke (1996) wryly remarks that

Africans received the gospel of commodification into their homes and their selves, but the converts have to date never behaved as their putative masters and teachers expected. They preached their own gospel about goods and they interpreted the holy writ of advertising in their own multiple and unpredictable ways. (1996:165)

Classifying ‘the middle class’

What seems worth pursuing in all of this is the issue of a black ‘middle class’ in relation to *Tribute* as an irrelevant and/or elitist title because it depicts and urges into being that which is widely associated with a (white) ‘middle class lifestyle’. This should not need saying, but my use of the scare quote, the parenthesis and the slash is purposeful and bears upon the question “What do we mean by a black ‘middle class’?”

Initially, we might feel safe in assuming that ‘the middle class’ “comprises people in occupational positions such as “sales clerks and teachers, ...executives, professionals and...the self-employed” (Oliver and Shapiro 1997:70). But Melvin Oliver and Thomas Shapiro, for example, offer the following response to the question of what is meant by the term.

Some demark the limits simply in terms of income; others include education or occupation in the definition. Most scholars embrace a class conception based on the work of Karl Marx or Max Weber and make this their central focus...[so that] middle class means working in a white collar occupation or being self-employed....[W]e confirm that the economic foundation of the black middle class is not dependent on any one way of thinking about class. The point of this exercise is to show that an accurate and realistic appraisal of the economic footing of the black middle class reveals its precariousness, marginality, and fragility. (1997:92-93)⁵

Admittedly, their work does not neatly intersect with my discussion of the issues involved in seeing *Tribute* as a valid form of consumer-mediated black South African culture: Oliver and Shapiro are making a point against the taken-for-grantedness of a so-called black American middle class. Their argument is that the ‘myth of American middle classness’ as a preferred and aspirational social norm should lead people to *critique* the myth for its anomalous production of

a growing black underclass. One needs to take seriously such persistent inequalities, yet this ought not to preclude the attempt to address sympathetically an equally persistent aspiration, within the contexts of consumer culture, for upward social mobility. Oliver and Shapiro's recognition that a black middle class is likely to be characterised not by coherence but by "precariousness, marginality, and fragility" (1997:93) might usefully be turned in a slightly different critical direction.

Although this entails referring to the present rather than to the late 1980s in which *Tribute* was launched, we need to allow that in the 1990s *Tribute* has been capitalising on the waves of black aspiration that accompanied the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990 and, subsequently, the long-anticipated reality of a democratic social order. In the late 1990s, there exists a black middle class comprising both a political elite and a professional class made up of the likes of bankers, insurance salespeople, academics, teachers, public relations, marketing and advertising personnel. With the opening up of schools to pupils of all races in 1995, the move towards professionalisation is set to intensify. Indeed, so is the move to suburbia: black parents are frequently said to send their children to school in the suburbs as a precursor to moving there. "Down the motorway to Soweto, at the end of the school day, drive convoys of minibuses, crammed with black pupils in regulation school hats. They are heading home from school in the suburbs" (*Sunday Tribune Property Journalist* 1996:6). At the same time, though, even across race and class divisions, there is widespread criticism of a government gravy train, and of a new black elite, many of whom are in the service of the ANC government, various ANC-dominated provincial administrations, and the public service more broadly. This dissatisfaction is voiced by a number of constituencies, especially COSATU (the Congress of South African Trade Unions), which in mid-August 1997 successfully carried out a campaign of stayaways and rolling mass action; it is also given a wide public purchase in being aired in the popular press, and sometimes on television. The analogue is that *Tribute* magazine has continually to justify rather than simply assume its mandate.

That 'class' (especially when placed alongside race) is a contradictory and notoriously unstable marker of identity, is acknowledged even by Tomaselli and Tomaselli (1987), whose work I have already characterised as being primarily concerned with questions of political economy, and thus as being as likely as any, in the South African context, to hypostatise a black middle class. Instead, an aspect of their argument is that discrete class divisions are not necessarily useful in conceptualising late-twentieth-century South African social formations. Despite the fact that they finally marshal their material towards ends different from mine, when discussing the rise of a black South African press and the struggle for a buffer between black poverty and white privilege, they use the expression "black middle classes" to mean "workers from the administrative/bureaucratic, service and manufacturing sectors of the economy", and they make no distinction between the contribution to advanced capitalist societies of "productive and non-productive" labours (1987:109). Such a position at least gestures towards the inadequacy of the purist definition of class which distinguishes between productive working class and non-productive 'middle class' forms of labour, and seeks to 'describe' the ideological relevance, or otherwise, of the respective class positions.

Thus in relation to the mandate and readership of *Tribute*, it seems important to conceptualise 'class' (and its adjunct 'upward social mobility'), as a creative category rather than a clearly demonstrable or absolute fact. It is not inherently linked to a labour or to an agency that can easily be welcomed or denied as relevant or irrelevant. Something known as 'a black middle class' (and a body of people which recognises 'itself' through this enunciation) will rely now on attempting to establish and secure boundaries between itself and 'others', and now on actual and

conceptual boundary crossings which are as likely to be the result of inarticulate feelings as they are of conscious critical negotiation.

It is here that I take a few liberties with Bourdieu's notion of 'habitus', developed in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984). While his concept has been useful to me, Bourdieu sometimes seems overly-intent on enumerating absolute distinctions of taste and ascribing them to particular, self-evident classes as forms of cultural capital. Habitus is rather uncomfortably close to the biologically mappable habitat. Although Bourdieu tends to emphasise habitus as generative schema and classificatory system, embedded in his discussion is the idea which I wish to emphasise: 'habitus' as not a systematic set of dispositions which human beings of a particular class *will* exhibit, but a possible way of ordering what might otherwise appear to be completely random and idiosyncratic tastes, preferences and 'lifestyles'. The possibility exists, therefore, that a 'habitus' may be variously evident and fabulated, and hence drawn on by various shifting collectivities. Following Sonja Laden, who uses Bourdieu without critical reservation in her unpublished work on "National Consciousness in Magazines for the Black Bourgeoisie in South Africa", I use the term 'middle class' not primarily to designate an empirical, already-existing grouping, but a loose collectivity of actual and ideational belonging. In other words, I refer to a middle class 'habitus' "in the sense of a range of cultural and social dispositions"; a loose collocation of "aspirational and perceptual options, rather than...a definition of those who 'belong' to this middle class based on a statistical survey of monthly income and expenditure" (Laden no date a:7).

Accordingly, even members of what Press would probably prefer to call a revolutionary black 'working class' may conceive of themselves as borrowing from the registers of education, upward mobility and consumption through which 'middle classness' is frequently connoted. Similarly, the more-or-less white collar, black professional classes may on occasions seek to articulate a sense of 'self' by re-conceptualising cultural connections with precisely those 'other' classes from whom they have struggled to emerge. Further, a black middle class may provisionally celebrate the very discourses of consumption that it regards critically as expressive of an historically white consumer privilege. A black 'middle class', too, is a marker of social identity which is ambivalently interpreted: it is often at once the object of criticism, and the object of desire. Black professionals in general are the objects of praise and emulation, even as they are urged to address (or *redress*) the continuing injustices of the system through which they have advanced so that other black people may also enjoy the benefits of an upwardly mobile lifestyle. Such an unstable sense of 'middle classness' is crucial in understanding the signification of *Tribute*, and my subsequent use in this Chapter of a singular 'middle class' is a convenience. The singular is a misrepresentation, since no unitary, objectively verifiable 'middle class' subject position or coherent subjectivity exists. In view of the contradictory discourses through which *Tribute* is marketed and possibly used by an audience, the magazine's frequent validation of black professionals cannot be considered merely a mouthpiece for a privileged black elite; and nor can it simply be dismissed as the persuasive voice of white capital. Instead, the magazine is an excellent example of the often expedient political economy of consumer culture being turned to curious effect.⁶

Lifestyle and Politics: Unstable South African Signifiers

The initial *Tribute* editorial team sought to affirm lifestyle as a valid area of black experience and interest, even as it was anxious not to represent the magazine as being merely a superficial 'lifestyle' text that avoided the explicitly politicised discourses of racist South African realities. I wish, now, to return to an earlier claim: 'lifestyle' and 'style', long considered merely spurious

excrescences, have in the pages of *Tribute* functioned as powerfully dramatic (and no doubt politically-charged) signifiers of 'new' forms of black South African identity. In some respects *Tribute*'s style and intended audience bear out David Harvey's claim that the international media have characterised the 1980s as the decade of yuppie affluence, "with its accoutrements of gentrification, close attention to symbolic capital, fashion, design and quality of urban life" (1989:332). The media industries even generated a local label for so-called black yuppies: 'buppies' or 'bumpies', and *Tribute* was superciliously envisaged by some to be serving "today's hip young Bumpy [Black] Upwardly Mobile Professional", for whom "the Struggle is one long cocktail party" (Page 1987:31). *Tribute* was dismissed as one among the "flashy lifestyle magazines that currently serve the black cocktail circuit" (Page 1987:31).

Yet the figure of the global yuppie – black or otherwise – and the visible black corporate-consumer presence associated with the demise of apartheid and the struggle towards democracy are similar, but not entirely analogous subjectivities. In the South African case, black people's conspicuous consumption is also to be connected to a desire to make dramatically visible a sense of emergent, often collective power. In an editorial of the early 1990s, Nokwande Sithole asserted that one of the magazine's aims is to represent and to realise those areas of black South African experience in which lifestyle signifies a challenge to the rhetorics and actual physical boundaries through which apartheid tried to secure white superiority.

Too many of us have placed so much emphasis on the struggle for so long that we have institutionalised it. [Yet t]he student radicals of the 1970s have sprung up in all sorts of senior positions in the corporate world....[So] to apologise for being black and having an address in Bruma Lake is tantamount to saying Verwoerd was correct – you were never meant to be.

'My name is Sipho Ngcobo. I am 35. I rent a penthouse in Mykonos.' Doesn't it have the most arrogant ring of triumph to it?

Forget the rumours that when you leave the township or become wealthy you forget about where you came from. There are countless examples that black folk don't forget. (September 1992:1)

And:

The women of Mshenguville provide important lessons on triumph. Locked in squalid living and working conditions, they emerge from their homes every morning dressed in the most stylish fashions; fashions that their miserable supervisors only dream about.

When the metal-workers decided to build a car for the Commander-in-Chief of Umkhonto we Sizwe, Nelson Mandela, they did not make him a beat-up jeep called Viva. In a situation where they probably do not have cars themselves, they built him a Mercedes Benz. (September 1992:1)

More specifically than a testimony to global yuppiedom or the simple proliferation of an international class of youthful corporate-consumers, then, a magazine like *Tribute* has been a reaffirmation, in the South African context, of black people's having mastered the apartheid city, and of the need for texts which speak an appropriately varied, even a confused concatenation of discourses (popular, professional, elite, ordinary, urban, traditional, transitional...) through which a variety of emergent subjectivities might be negotiated.

If *style* remains a contentious and confusing critical category, one still not easily invoked as legitimate in an evaluation of the texts of consumer culture, *politics* as traditionally understood has also been part of the *Tribute* agenda. *Tribute* was something of an anomaly when it originally appeared, in that it did not rely consistently upon familiar claims of politicised 'black identity', yet it is also true that from the first issue there was an attempt to offset 'lifestyle' with seriousness, so-called soft journalism with 'hard'. From the beginning of the magazine's planning and pre-production, the original editorial team is reputed to have insisted – against the publisher's own more cynical motives – that black people were not about to be attracted solely by the gloss and high society news which have come to be considered the stock-in-trade of the lifestyle periodical.

Motanyane, who was editor until 1990, points out that in working with Psillos, members of the editorial team

had to do a lot of convincing to get him to see that *Tribute* could not just be a *Tatler*-type magazine. I had always believed in the importance of having good role models...but we also set out to strike a balance by covering the politics and the economic and corporate struggles of black people at the time. *Tribute* had to be contextualised and we had to struggle hard for it to be accepted. (Cited in Mosotho 1997:40)

At the time, the most powerfully persuasive discourses of *positive* black representation were not 'lifestyle' or 'consumption, but solidarity (or at least collectivity), and various conjugations of anti-apartheid and anti-capitalism. These functioned as moral constraints on the editorial ambience of the new magazine. "Because of these pressures and the simple reality of where black people came from, we had to balance the lifestyle side of *Tribute* by publishing articles that acknowledged and supported the struggle against oppression" (Motanyane, cited in Mosotho 1997:41). Even here, of course, there was no direct congruence between the ideals of 'the struggle' and those of the new black title, for the editorial team seems to have foregrounded 'oppression' in its racial rather than economic sense; capitalism was advocated as the means for black people to rise above an apartheid-induced poverty. Once I had recognised this struggle over emphasis and ideology, for example, I was freer to imagine 'the magazine' not simply as text but as derived from human endeavour, and from differences of belief and senses of self. This led me away from an insistence on the magazine's representing the inappropriate imposition upon black South Africans of exploitative capitalist structures.

In the search for a suitably radical counterweight to glamorous consumption, those compiling the first edition turned, not unexpectedly, to political codes. Specifically, they sought to legitimate the magazine by invoking that most eminently overcoded of political signifiers, Nelson Mandela. Mandela was at the time imprisoned at Pollsmoor in the Western Cape, and the lead article in the first issue "featured Zindzi Mandela speaking about her father" (Mosotho 1997:39). The cover (opting for the popular phonic spelling of the daughter's name) proclaims: "ZINZI MANDELA: The inside story". Despite the intentional 'political correctness' of the Mandela cover line, though, the 'serious' political function imputed to the story was at the same time mediated by a cover line which borrowed from the discourses of personality, individualism and sensational revelation in which readers were likely to have been previously schooled by any number of existing consumer magazines targeted at both black and white readerships. How one wishes to theorise this crossing of generic boundaries is a matter of intellectual taste. Does it attest to the inevitable trivialisation of public political discourses in the manner of tabloid-style journalism? Or, possibly, does it valuably recast false distinctions between the serious and the inconsequential, the public and the private? If *Tribute*'s founding team believed that it was necessary to announce the struggle 'street cred' of the new title by showcasing the politically spectacular, at the same time their strategy creatively (if unconsciously) presented the political story from a surprisingly domestic, intimate perspective. It should be said, here, that the Mandela piece had been commissioned for another magazine, and that the Mandela family (its public visibility embodied more in the outspoken authority of Winnie Mandela than in the imprisoned Nelson) at first sought to distance itself from *Tribute*. The magazine was an unknown, and indeed unsettling quantity in that it did not take the familiar, radical position on the black South African struggle. As I have mentioned, similar reservations characterised the response of Cyril Ramaphosa, then General secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers: in 1988 he refused to grant an interview to a magazine which was paying tribute "to black bourgeois reactionaries", but *Tribute* staffers managed to put together an article "on the basis of research and interviews conducted with his colleagues" (Mosotho 1997:40).

If politics was the most visible signifier of 'black identity' in a time of mass action and resistance, it is also the case that the mid to late 1980s witnessed the broadening of African social and economic opportunity and the rise of a loosely-defined African middle class. One might imagine that an increase in the mass-mediated *visibility* of black people with financial and symbolic cultural capital would have been a correlative. Instead, a middle class black identity was considered something not openly to be acknowledged. The ideal of a black collectivity represented an inspirationally unified front against racist exploitation, and the very visibility of apartheid's *racial* principle worked to occlude the fact of black people's corporate and professional achievement.

There are a number of observations worth making about this 'othered' identity; these are usefully implied in a quotation from Motanyane. She explains that despite the overtly politicised tenor of black South African life under apartheid structures in the late 1980s the

black middle class was burgeoning – children of those who could afford it were attending 'multi-racial' schools, people owned businesses, they drove luxury cars, they travelled overseas...except it was all happening behind the scenes. Until then, those who publicly confessed to any comforts or material possessions, were ostracised and accused of aspiring to the values of the white oppressors. It was only when people like [township entrepreneur] Richard Maponya...dared speak out, that others started feeling more comfortable about their middle-class values and lifestyles. (*Tribute* 1997:20)⁷

Confession, accusation, daring to speak out...the moral imperatives at work here are undeniable. If many critics remain uncomfortable with the upwardly mobile dynamic of the black identities expressed in and encouraged through *Tribute*, it seems difficult to ignore the possibility that in uneven ways the heterogeneous staff of *Tribute* have been engaged in an activity familiar to us from revisionist cultural-historical projects. These energies are known to South African academics through initiatives from a variety of disciplines, particularly that of History in the Wits History Workshop. Also relevant here are the author lists of Ravan and Ad. Donker, publishers who brought to widespread attention individual creative writers like Mtutuzeli Matshoba, as well as pathbreaking anthologies covering popular-intellectual cultural phenomena like 'Soweto poetry' and South African women's stories. To different degrees, all of these have made visible a number of previously ignored images and narratives of South African life. The *Tribute* phenomenon is not identical to the writing of history 'from below', but it has involved the searching out and recuperating of 'lost' voices and experience, the strategic popularisation of once denigrated 'positive' images, and the insistence on a valid sense of 'self'. Indeed, *Tribute*'s representations of upwardly mobile, 'middle class' black people could be considered analogous to the deliberate idealisations accorded during the 1980s to the domestic and factory labour believed to constitute a 'black working class'.

Tribute should (could?) surely be considered in the light of such literary-cultural recovery.⁸ As readers were reminded in one of Qwelane's editorials of the early 1990s, for example, among the originary aims of the magazine were "to provide a forum that highlights what black people can and do achieve; to prove that black people can move into the future with dignity and determination; and to provide black youths with positive role models" (January 1992:1). Similarly, he affirms in an editorial later that year that "the message of *Tribute*" is "a salute to those many unsung heroes and heroines of our time who rose above adversity to become leaders in their chosen walks of life, and symbols of excellence to our community" (October 1992:1). The contents page of April 1993, furthermore, advertises the category "PEOPLE" through the following question: "Who are our budding personalities in the making, the unsung heroes and heroines of our day? They are ordinary people from all walks of life, and they are quietly changing the face of our society" (1993:3). Whether we wish to read such discourses as the expedient mimicry of more authentic cultural voices (my own inclination, clearly, would not be

so cynical), or to investigate the curious intersections between *Tribute* and other forms of literary-cultural recovery, the matter clearly deserves attention.⁹

I want to take this a little further by returning to Motanyane's phrasing in the above quotation, where we may notice, on a second reading, that the legitimating of *Tribute* is attempted through a number of not-quite synchronous idioms. Motanyane's claims are familiar to us not only from the challenges levelled to a literary-cultural establishment by Black Consciousness and feminism, both of which urged people to speak out about the circumstances of their realities and to invent inspirational myths, but also from an/other struggle for identity. In particular, Motanyane's idiom is inflected with the tones of gay and lesbian liberation ("behind the scenes", "dared speak out"), and she in fact continues, in the piece from which the quotation was extracted, to claim that *Tribute* "proceeded to 'out' those black people who had a story to tell" (1997:20). This is an especially powerful symbolism through which to have chosen to validate *Tribute* to a late-1990s audience. (Motanyane's comment, remember, is taken from the 1997 issue of *Tribute* celebrating the magazine's 'decade'.) It is difficult to believe that she writes without some understanding of its contemporary emotive power: if sexualities 'other' than hetero continue to be marginalised as deviant or at best transgressive, there now exists a slightly more sympathetic climate of understanding than previously for people of various sexual orientations. Thus her representing of class differences amongst black people in the politicised 1980s through a 1990s discourse of gay analogy might well be intended to promote acceptance for the magazine, rather than knee-jerk criticism of its unacceptable lifestyle emphasis. In seeking a sympathetic critical reception for *Tribute*, Motanyane represents black middle classness as having been in a subaltern or occulted position vis-a-vis what were at the time the most hegemonically recurrent representations of an oppressed black South African majority. These representations were a concatenation comprising among other things resistance, violence, privation, and dispossession, all of which were familiar to South Africans through a range of actual and symbolic figures such as the mass rally, the raised fist, and the shouted 'Amandla!'; the derelict township, the ramshackle shack 'city'; the burning, necklaced body, and the pot-bellied child. These were not isolated 'images', but had through repetition and even naturalisation been informally structured into tropes which were fundamental to those contemporaneous discourses that claimed to 'explain' black life under late apartheid. They tended, as I see it, to entrench the belief that black South Africans were a distinctly different 'other', one that could only be conceptualised as passively disadvantaged or as politically aggressive. In comparison, Motanyane seems to be implying that in the 1980s *Tribute* staffers took up the unenviable challenge of revealing to a South African 'self' a facet which it had repeatedly repressed and denied. (If Wicomb's critical position is anything to go by, this form of black subjectivity is still not widely acknowledged.)

In discussing how the discourses of race and class have been put to work in relation to *Tribute*, let me pursue a cognate issue, even though it entails immersing myself in the conceptual morass of racial sameness and difference. As a form of initial illustration, I must quote at length a letter written by a white reader from Mandini.

A warm welcome to Jon Qwelane. I hope you will be happy at *Tribute* and wish you many years with us. I say 'us' because I wish *Tribute* could be made compulsory reading for all South Africans. It is refreshingly different to read about our own royalty – King Zwelithini, Swazi princesses...It's good to see people smartly dressed, driving-top-of the range cars and achieving in every sector, and, I might add, having achieved all this against the greatest odds. Grounded in apartheid, witnessing the inhumanity of the whole system, has made me fearful of reaching out to black people. Why would they want to be friends with me? Just because I'm white? But now I've found *Tribute* and every month I meet new people and make many good friends. Friends I could even take home to mother! Don't ever stop *Tribute*, as I feel that you are my lifeline to the real world. (November 1992:8)

The cynical intelligence (my own included) might initially cringe at this letter. It is so hopelessly (hopefully?) liberal humanist; residually patronising, and unable to read beyond the conventions of the magazine genre – the constant recycling of famous figures; the personification of the text as friend and confidante; the letters page as a legislative or normative forum and so on. Yet something in this suspicious hermeneutic remains dissatisfying: perhaps the unwillingness to see credibility and even authority in the letter writer's struggle to articulate a generous intent. The honest South African cultural commentator might instead admit that in various shades of lilac the writer's purple-prosed idealism informs many of our strivings for a 'better', a 'new', a 'democratic' South Africa. This tendency is in *Tribute* 'itself', for despite its primarily black readership, the magazine sporadically suspends the historical burden of white South Africans so as to imagine a space in which white people – at least those progressively-inclined – may feel at home in South Africa rather than alienated and guilty. Is it any wonder, then, that *Tribute* appealed to me?

Within the overtly racial structures of South Africa when *Tribute* was launched, 'blackness' signified, to me, difference. The individuals shown by *Tribute* to represent a black middle class were easier to effect imaginative alliances with than, say, something called 'black experience' or 'the masses', who in fundamental respects remained 'strange' to white South Africans, despite the authoritative claims made by many white intellectuals on behalf of black identity. Within my own anxiously white South African experiential field, part of *Tribute*'s function was to render the *unlike* – a black middle class – reassuringly familiar. This was despite the fact that the intersections of class interest as displayed in advertising and the discourses of democracy and consumption were never completely coherent with my position within a white middle class constituency. Nevertheless, while differences remained, points of contact needed to be discovered if white South Africans were to be persuaded of the human value of an imminent new South Africa. The class of professional, educated black people represented in *Tribute* became a point of imaginative contact in accommodating me to a different kind of political future. Thus the comparatively new form of human visibility which *Tribute* granted black people was able to be read through an idealised non-racial convergence which was constituted through the common pursuit of consumption. In effect, whatever the elements of a reverse discourse of assertive black identity informing *Tribute*'s editorial policy, the advertising of middle class and upper middle class consumerism was a symbolic prompt for South Africans of partly intersecting class standing tentatively to consider themselves contributors to a South African 'we' that crossed racial divisions. The images, editorial, advertising and copy in *Tribute* hinted that far from being essentially different, 'black' and 'white' people had correspondent or analogous experiences, desires, aspirations, fears. We were like – at least in some respects, and able to 'like' one another.

The issues of 'sameness' and 'difference' as highly charged nodes of negotiation, then, involve both that universalising of a 'human condition' which has been soundly criticised by numerous contemporary theorists, and a more materialist appeal to socially and politically specific contexts. Whatever the complexities I may construct, however, the relationship of cultural difference to apparent cultural homogeneity remains problematic. My argument is not one likely to earn many points with left-oriented critics of contemporary culture. In particular, cultural identity presented under the umbrella of consumption tends to be associated with the assimilation and incorporation of difference into a hegemonic norm that is usually considered by its critics to be a culturally debased coca-colonisation, and/or a white-washing of cultural diversity. We have already met something of this position in the views of Press and Wicomb. Many others abound. Let me refer, here, to the ideas of the African-American theorist Michele Wallace, who might be inclined to level against *Tribute* a version of her American mass culture critique. Wallace argues

that in the mass media black people are rendered laudable only when they possess the attributes of commoditised 'white' culture; 'Culture' is then "reduced to a style of consumption" rather than being "a concrete or complex textualization of cultural difference.... [N]o one is ultimately different, since culture is something you can buy at Bloomingdales, a kind of wardrobe or a form of entertainment (Wallace 1990:2). Further, she critiques the embedded ideological preferences of "mainstream culture" which permit the habitual assumption that "the first job of Afro-American mass culture...should be to 'uplift the race', or to salvage the denigrated image of blacks in the white American imagination" (1990:1).

As I have been arguing, however, *Tribute's* assertive discourses of black middle classness have perhaps fulfilled functions which are valuable in precisely these ways. The images and discourses disseminated in the magazine may have had the effect of urging South Africans to acknowledge an important, and long-denied truth: South African experience could not easily be categorised through recourse to convenient binaries, whether 'us and them', 'white and black', 'privileged and disadvantaged' or any permutation of such homologies. Put slightly differently: to be a black South African did not necessarily entail an apparently inherent poverty, submission, or ethnic tribalism, or (in what seemed to be the alternative through which the binary was staged) terrorism, militancy, and activism. Instead, there were numbers of black people who were as well (if not better) educated, more stylish, and indeed more admirably human than many whites. That this recognition was offered through such ostensibly superficial markers as lifestyle and economic success should not make it any the less consequential in a country where racist exclusions and assumptions had been systematically legislated. Although my only yardstick is my own experience, I cannot dismiss the possibility, then, that the images and verbal content in *Tribute* may have had a humane and humanising effect upon many people's consciousnesses, comprising an iconography declarative of a black urban presence worthy of emulation, rather than derogation. In the context of shifting South African cultural and national identities, I'm willing to allow that *Tribute* has valuably delineated both 'blackness' and 'South Africanness' in the public spaces of mass-mediated messages and images. And this is particularly the case, I think, when these spaces have tended not to represent black subjectivity as modern and urban(e)ly competent. *Tribute* has affirmed a black subjectivity that is assured in its sophisticated demeanour, can engage with the present on its own terms, and often far surpasses the limitations of both 'white realities' and 'white imaginations'.

A Quick Look at *Drum*

While I am concerned with the ways in which *Tribute* seemed to give a new visibility to forms of contemporary black South African experience, it is also important to note, I think, that the white-owned periodical press had already played a role in disseminating a 'modern' repertoire of images and ideas for black South Africans. The foremost position in this regard has regularly been reserved for the well-known *Drum*, especially in its 1950s and 1960s incarnations. Many commentators agree that it was probably *Drum* which most obviously revelled in the display of consciously urban, cosmopolitan black South African identities. My purpose here is not to offer a detailed account of *Drum's* history – there are numerous studies which take this as their focus.¹⁰ (I also return to *Drum* when I consider the literary discourses through which *Tribute's* brand identity is animated.) But it is useful to recall that although *Drum* was founded in 1951 as African Drum (my emphasis), and while early numbers "contained African poems and stories; articles on 'Music of the Tribes' and 'Know Yourselves' recounting the history of the Bantu tribes; instalments of Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948); features about religion; and strip cartoons about Gulliver and St. Paul" (Sampson 1956:16), 'Africans' were not overwhelmingly

interested in the new publication. Sampson (1956) offers at least one explanation for this in the comments of a man whom he met in the Bantu Men's Social Centre.

'Ag, why do you dish out that stuff, man?....Tribal music! Tribal history! Chiefs! We don't care about chiefs! Give us jazz and film stars, man! We want Duke Ellington, Satchmo, and hot dames! Yes, brother, anything American. You can cut out this junk about kraals and folk-tales and Basuthos in blankets – forget it! You're just trying to keep us backward, that's what! Tell us what's happening right here, man, on the Reef!' (1956:20)

If the insistence is perhaps partly for rhetorical effect, the comments do reveal something of the sociological provocations underlying cultural affiliations, and imply that black people were able to discover odd value in the very forms of 'western' culture that might more conventionally be thought 'foreign' and even disabling. Driver's recent work on *Drum* takes issue with such arguments, partly on the grounds that the mass-mediated discourses of the urban through which *Drum* foregrounded black identity in the 1950s necessarily worked to the detriment and exclusion of black women. As Driver sees it, *Drum* popularised a modern and masculinist ethos that coercively regulated black women's realities through inappropriate aspirational models (1996) such as that of the sexy woman-about-town, and the mistress of a commodified domesticity. While the reference, in the quotation above, to "hot dames" does enunciate a particular form of modern masculinity, it remains difficult to discern precisely the extent to which the images and idioms of *Drum* were perceived by any of its readers to be inappropriate and/or alienating. It is noteworthy, for instance, that despite taking issue with the magazine, Driver acknowledges the complexity of the precepts shaping *Drum* – modernity, tradition, idealisations and dismissals of femininity – and almost reluctantly admits that *Drum* embraced "a modernity apparently yearned for by the rapidly growing black urban population of the time, [and] *Drum*'s circulation rose steadily through the 1950s, letters poured in from readers, and its journalists were emulated and adored" (1996:231).

It is moments of insight such as this which underpin Rob Nixon's argument concerning *Drum*. He explains that in defying National party attempts to 'fossilise' Africans into tribal identities, *Drum* "amplified the voices of a defiantly impure cosmopolitanism, projecting an urban look and ethos, and confirming the professional classes in their attachment to the city" (Nixon 1994:28). In stressing that urban heterogeneity was not intrinsically an inappropriate or marginalising aspect of contemporaneous black South African culture, Nixon juxtaposes *Drum* with the fictional black identities created by Alan Paton in his novel *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948). (The international popularity of this poignant story meant that it acquired iconic status not merely as *the* South African novel, but as representative of South Africa's 'tragic race relations'.) Nixon reminds us that despite the marked appeal of Paton's liberal Christian imagery for many white readers, several black South African writers reacted negatively to Paton's images of black life. They objected, for instance, to his representation of 'worthy' black people as characters defined by "unctuous religiosity...deference, and...urban incompetence", features which demonised city life. The anti-urban bias of literary texts such as Paton's, Nixon emphasises, was antithetical to the belief systems of many professional black people, and did not constitute an experiential-linguistic repertoire recognisable to the young urban African. As he continues, if urbanisation "was indeed, for many Africans, a saga of bewilderment and loss; ...it also held out prospects of relative economic advancement and cultural excitement" (Nixon 1994:28).

All of these comments help to convey a rudimentary sense of *Tribute*'s lineage, as it were, and to denote some of the literary-cultural strategies through which the magazine could be analysed. *Tribute* may be thought to reinforce and extend the repertoire of urban competence and creativity already popularised through magazines such as *Drum*. As I read the text, *Tribute* has an ambiguous aura, if you like, reminiscent of *Drum* in its flashy, yet politically-provocative

1950s heyday, when “its tawdry, irresponsible air” and “its commercial guise somewhat belied its importance as an articulator of the black experience and black aspirations” (Addison 1978:6). This dynamic between mass cultural texts of the 1950s and their readers engaged the imagination of A.P. Mda, one-time theorist of the ANC Youth League. Writing in 1955, he expressed a belief that journals such as *Zonk!* and *Drum* “reflect a spineless liberalistic philosophy and...glorify the fads and foibles of the most degenerate classes among the Western nations” (1955:no page). Yet this did not preclude his considering that such magazines also “had an immediate impact on the psychological make-up of our people, more especially the youth....No doubt the monthly journals and pictorials have served in no small way to destroy the sense of inferiority and futility which have eaten into the very vitals of our national life” (1955:no page). Mda’s equivocation might usefully be borne in mind as we respond to *Tribute*. While *Tribute* is implicated in consumer culture, we might nevertheless allow that the profit-inspired, politically-compromised principles of a publisher can resonate beyond the materialistic demand. As readers express it in the letters page

Tribute is my type of magazine. I have been buying it ever since its inception. It is a source of enrichment to me, promoting self-reliance, creating meaningful co-existence with fellow human beings....*Tribute* has been a source of mental empowerment in most spheres of my social existence. (March 1993:8).

And:

Tribute has done more than any other magazine I know of. It has covered so much ground to inform the people and restore our dignity in such a short time. It has reminded us of the past and has shown us where we are today, thus giving us a clearer perception of our role in the ‘new’ South Africa. (March 1994:2)

Cultural Complexity: Covers and Content as Celebration and Critique

As a way of making *Tribute* more tangible, let me attempt to characterise the covers and contents of several issues, for while an individual reader may make idiosyncratic (and therefore difficult to theorise) use of *Tribute*, an intention of the magazine’s editorial teams has been to challenge the racist construction of South African experience precisely by representing in images and copy a number of underestimated ‘black South African’ potentials: professionalism, economic success, beauty, fashionable style, intellectual achievement...and indeed, political power. In discussing the matter of covers and contents pages, I hope to indicate that *Tribute* has been envisaged as expanding black horizons, for the images and features are not restricted to sport, music and journalism, many of which, as I have said, have become stereotypically ‘black’ areas of achievement and success.¹¹

From *Tribute*’s inception, the magazine’s cover images have most frequently depicted local black achievers, in poses variously decorous or triumphant, ingenuous or knowing, provocative or sentimentally moving. (Figures 1.i – 1.iii.) Writer and professor Es’kia Mphahlele; local ‘supermodel’ Innocentia; television presenter Doreen Morris; Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu; one-time trade-unionist, and subsequently chief ANC strategist Cyril Ramaphosa....Each of these figures, usually addressing a potential reader in either a close-up or a three-quarter shot, is a powerfully representative presence, especially when the visual (and its glossy sheen) is experienced in conjunction with the tactility of the expensive paper. As I see it, a valuable socio-cultural function is being fulfilled by *Tribute* covers, even if a general audience (imagined as comprising any South African who sees the magazine or its advertising) does not necessarily read the contents. The covers represent a significant investment in the brand, and by extension in the human experience covered by the brand, in a South African publishing industry that has not been noted for its willingness to invest capital in titles intended for the so-called black market.

Traditionally, publishers of 'black titles' have tended to keep production costs as low as possible by compromising on the quality of paper, reproduction copy, editorial and thus on product. Recently, this tendency has changed, with the appearance of titles like *Tribute*, the redesigning of *True Love*, and the increased, weekly frequency of *Drum*. All of these are titles recognised by the industry to be successfully reaching their niche audiences precisely on account of the capital spent to fashion them into attractive entities with excellent editorial (Campher 1997a:5).¹²

Tribute's editorial environment is characterised by a similar social investment in the complexity of South African human relations. This becomes apparent when we engage with the relation of individual editors to editorial environment. While watertight distinctions are not, in my opinion, self-evident to either the casual reader or to the researcher, to some extent the ambience of the magazine bears the journalistic style and intellectual orientation of the editor. Mosotho suggests, for example, that during her editorship from 1990 to 1992 Nokwande Sithole gave the magazine a 'young' feel, while S'bu Mngadi may be said to have promoted an editorial environment which emphasised the capacity of stories and features to address particularly the issue of black *economic* empowerment (Mosotho 1997:41). Most explicitly distinctive, in my view, is the unusual brand of investigative journalism brought to a lifestyle title by Jon Qwelane in both his stints as editor (1992-1995, and February 1997 to August 1997).¹³ During his editorships Qwelane broke stories such as the controversial fall from grace of Mohale Mahanyale, the man primarily behind the initial success of the National Sorghum Breweries. He had allegedly misused the finances of a venture which had been widely considered, according to Qwelane, "to epitomise black entrepreneurial success" (December 1993:1). The iconoclastic cover image of this edition features Mahanyale in full professorial regalia alongside the coverline "THE BIG RIP-OFF! Mahanyale and the NSB" (See Figure 1.ii.). As I have already said, then, hagiographic imagery may be turned by the magazine to ironic purpose. Importantly, Qwelane also produced editorial copy that made 'emotional news': if he used facts to social purpose, he also had no truck with facticity as primary truth. In one editorial, he ridiculed "South Africa's manic obsession with the *race* thing", asserting that ours

is a changing country, and for that reason we intend to reflect the dynamics of our changing society in the stories we publish.

We do not worship holy cows, and any that come our way will be quickly slaughtered.

We are raising and reporting issues and people no other publication touches, and it is only the beginning. (August 1993:1)

Many readers would also encounter Qwelane's journalist persona on his Talk Radio 702, "Talk at 9". As advertisements for this programme declared

Jon
Qwelane
takes
all the bull
by the horns.

Jon Qwelane is one of the most outspoken and respected journalists in South African today...

Whatever you say, don't expect him to mince his words.

Particularly with his views on the country we live in today. And the one we'll be living in tomorrow.

Hear his thoughts and give yours.

But if you have a beef about anything, just remember he won't accept any bull. (*Weekly Mail & Guardian* 14 January-20 January 1994:36)

Qwelane's editorships have been marked by similar provocation. They have also been noteworthy with respect to risk-taking. When he felt circumstances warranted, for example, he refused to adhere to the constraints of long time-lines that characterise magazine as opposed to newspaper journalism. According to Mosotho

Qwelane's training as a newsman dictated that when a good idea came up at the last minute, it had to be followed through. For example, on the morning when news of Chris Hani's assassination broke, there was a *Tribute* issue which was ready for printing. Qwelane...told the printers to hold the presses. He pulled the issue back and included a tribute to the slain ANC leader. (1997:41)

The discussion of Qwelane's individual contribution makes clear that content and style are partially attributable to the influence of a particular editor. Nevertheless, it is possible very loosely to characterise the kind of content that has appeared in *Tribute*. As a glance at any contents page will suggest, in either interviews or articles, the magazine features prominent politicians, business figures, sports and media stars, and various topical and popular issues (art, medicine, sexuality, politics...), as well as a disparate selection of 'information bits' (notices, reviews, advertisements) which compete for a reader's attention. Some might regard all of this sceptically, insisting that it is precisely through misleading representations of diversity that *Tribute* seeks to construct new black South African identities, invoking pluralism, individualism, 'choice' and the infinite novelty of capitalist modernity. This apparently human heterogeneity, it might be insisted, fails to account for macro constraints upon human experience – among which might be the structural subject positions of race, class, and gender – which restrict the making of real choices. An important inhibitor, here, it would probably be insisted, is capitalism itself, which perpetuates the myth of liberal consumption.¹⁴ In terms of this argument, *Tribute* would probably be construed as merely the creative embodiment, in the shape of what is after all a consumer magazine, of those spectacular symbols of 'lifestyle' which inform consumer questionnaires. Through categories such as 'income', 'eating out', 'bank and other accounts held', 'goods purchased recently' and 'place of residence', as we know, market researchers attempt to 'produce' a profile of the consumer, indeed to produce human relations in the reified shape of the consumer. (An example of such a questionnaire appears in the September 1993 issue of *Tribute*.) Yet as I am suggesting in this Chapter, if the content of *Tribute* intersects with 'lifestyle', this is not itself inherently separate from those areas of life habitually imagined by omniscient commentators to be more meaningful, serious structurings of human experience.

Let me illustrate this fairly briefly. When it comes to *Tribute* feature articles which focus on an individual in relation to an issue, the argument may have heroising valencies similar to those which motivate the valorising, glossy cover image. Through such tactics, *Tribute* has idealised a variety of black individuals, especially those of the professional strata of society. Yet in the actual cover story, the person's actions and beliefs are just as often subjected to scrutiny in order to provoke questions concerning the personal and institutional responsibilities of people in structuring their own experience. Indeed, in the editorial of the special ten-year celebratory issue, then-editor Mngadi argues for the role of *Tribute* as significant social mediator and arbiter. Citing previous editorials, he hopes to reiterate for readers a sense of the magazine's social mandate, claiming: "We shall not hesitate to expose any wrongs by anyone, however high or mighty, in the search for solutions to the mammoth problems which beset our country" (February 1997:5).

The June 1994 edition of *Tribute* contains apt illustrations of my points about cover image and contents. (See Figure 1.ii.) Framed in funky colours and uncluttered, 'modern' white spaces is local pop star Brenda Fassie. The pros and cons of her raucously independent "black Madonna" lifestyle as a music professional are raised in a feature by Heather Robertson, Arts and Literary Editor. While Robertson severely criticises Fassie's warped idea of relationships between black men and black women – "This is the Brenda Fassie version of black culture. You have to beat the love in. Most black women would beg to differ" – she perceives in the superstar a moving combination of generosity and need. As she writes

Brenda agrees to give me a lift home in her white 7 Series BMW. We drive up and down Parktown streets and somehow end up in Melville. All along the way, Brenda stops to ask flower sellers, newspaper vendors, people walking in the street, for directions to Harrow Road. Eyes light up in recognition. 'Au Sis Brenda.' She is wonderful. She obviously makes their day". (June 1994)

Despite *Tribute*'s circulation of black 'role-models', then, any interpretation of the magazine needs to deal with more than a simplistic, racial essentialism. Whatever the possibly compromised morality of a magazine underwritten by advertising revenue, the images of black life generated by *Tribute* are far from uni-faceted, or 'positive' in the conventional sense of the word. In fact, their very unsentimentality and diversity over any number of monthly issues could be said to function as a serial performative, illustrating that any identity, whether imagined collectively or through individual subjectivities, whether emphasising race, class or another subject position, is never a mimetic, stable, self-sufficient entity. Instead, *Tribute* has managed to suggest that identity is constantly being evolved through processes of delimitation and desire, themselves both political and psychological, and that these attempt, with recourse to imagination, to map a living space from the interstices of the 'real' and the 'fantastical'.

***Tribute* and Ndebele's Arguments for the Ordinary Rather Than the Spectacular**

Terms such as these – 'real' and 'fantastical' – bring me to the critical writing of Njabulo S. Ndebele and its bearing upon *Tribute* as a text of South African consumer culture.¹⁵ His critical writings discuss issues similar to those raised by Karen Press and Zoë Wicomb. Yet Ndebele deserves particular attention on account of his influence, prominence and extensive cultural commentary. Speaking generally, it is the instability rather than imagined coherence of Ndebele's intellectual profile that has been useful for me in trying to construct a frame of critical reference for *Tribute* magazine. Though his volume of essays conveys something of the difficult sea-changes which have recently been foregrounded in discussions of South African cultural discourse, more interesting than any imagined critical unity in the volume (and sometimes even in a single essay) is Ndebele's struggle to fashion out of often contradictory perspectives a 'progressive' position on forms of contemporary South African culture. In part, the contradictions can be theorised in relation to a shift in emphasis within South African life from a necessary focus on revolutionary struggle to the struggle for a more-broadly understood humane individualism in the service of civil society. Yet overall Ndebele's writing reminds me that an individual's intellectual life cannot be envisaged as a linear process from one 'outmoded' position to another which is considered more 'advanced'. Instead, categories are interrelated and overlapping, the emergent carries with it both lessons from the past as well as hoped-for visions and unwitting blindnesses concerning the future. The components of Ndebele's cultural philosophy constantly jostle for moral pre-eminence instead of ever completely securing it.

Ndebele has become especially well-known in academic circles for his discussion of the spectacular and the ordinary in South African life, and his criticism of the tendency in black South African creative writing towards surface information rather than creative explorations of experience. (The terms 'information' and 'experience' imply Walter Benjamin's influence on Ndebele.) In essays such as the "Rediscovery of the Ordinary" and "Turkish Tales: Some Thoughts on South African Fiction", Ndebele focuses on what he considers to be the shortcomings of creative writing in relation to the unremitting facticity of South African life, criticising the predilection amongst South African writers to represent merely the overtly spectacular facts of the South African social formation. Embedded in the commentary, however, is a critique of commodity culture.¹⁶ As he explains in the "Rediscovery of the Ordinary"

everything in South Africa has been mind-bogglingly spectacular: the monstrous war machine...; the random massive pass raids; mass shootings and killings; mass economic exploitation...; the mass

removals of people; the spate of draconian laws...; the luxurious life-style of whites: servants, all encompassing privilege, swimming pools and high commodity consumption....The symbols are all over: the quintessence of obscene social exhibitionism. (1994:41-42)

This conspicuous mass cultural display (culture being complexly understood as the dramatically visible, militarised politics of daily life, as well as the excesses of commodity consumption) threatened to reduce "the problems of the South African social formation...to a single, simple formulation" (1994:57). Against this, Ndebele makes a case for the representation of "the ordinary daily lives of people", a "complex and all-embracing" (1994:57) ordinariness which constitutes "the *very content* of the struggle, for the struggle involves people, not abstractions" (1994:57).

In particular, "Turkish Tales" conveys an uneasiness concerning the formation of 'modern' black subjectivity. Ndebele is anxious about the imposition of shallow identities on black people not merely by the spectacular oppressions and restrictions of apartheid, but also by the 'superficial' form of mass-mediated consumer culture that has functioned as a channel for apartheid stereotypes. As Ndebele expresses it, public perception of black life under apartheid has been conditioned not only by images of pathetic suffering – "tsotsi violence, shebeens, convicts, sexual promiscuity, faction fighting, mine compound life, 'witchdoctors', [and] 'strange' African customs" (1994:30), but also by advertising's expedient marketing of spectacularly 'middle class' images which only reinforced "the image of debasement, because these figures were perceived as caricatures of sophisticated white men". Accordingly

African medical doctors, teachers, township musicians, lawyers and others have been condescendingly promoted as symbols of African progress....[And in] African newspapers advertising promoted corresponding commodities of debasement: liquor, skin lightening creams, high-tar tobacco on the one hand, and correspondence schools etc. on the other, playing on eager hopes. (1994:30)

Ndebele sees no valuable resources within this black urban milieu. Instead, the visibility of a diverse black professional class is imagined to be wholly subsumed by the dubious teleology inherent in the term 'progress', while the negatively educative function of commodity culture is depicted as being absolutely cognate with the duplicitous discourses of moral-educative improvement through which apartheid attempted to persuade a 'better class' of African of its ability to enter into 'civilised' society. Ndebele makes a similar point in another essay, critiquing the 'fact' that if black people want to experience the semblance of freedom, they may in the short term

have no option but to fit into the available business and civil service culture and rise through the ranks. Suddenly, where the various structures of such a culture represented exclusion and repulsive, exploitative white power, now they may represent opportunity. The glitter of apartheid: buildings, banks, etc., previously an index of the oppressed's powerlessness, now represent, disturbingly, the possibility of fulfilment. (1994:153)

This he sees occurring at the terrible price of black people's "absorption and accommodation" (1994:154), and the sacrifice of "the quest for a self-created reality" (1994:154).¹⁷ (We have already met something similar in Michele Wallace's views on the proliferation of a 'Bloomingdale's' notion of cultural identity.)

However, in trying to produce a critically-informed reading of *Tribute*, I have begun to consider that information and experience, the spectacular and the ordinary, are inaccurate binaries.

I would be misguided to pretend that Ndebele is absolutely incorrect in his analysis; there are numerous studies on the complex relations between race, class and identity, enough to oblige me to acknowledge the vested interests which hegemonic powers may have in managing the media in order to achieve – or attempt to achieve – socially and financially expedient aims. Yet nor is the cultural philosophy underpinning Ndebele's commentary completely right in the kinds of emphases it prefers. Morphet, for instance, is not comfortable with Ndebele's readiness to explain spectacular black success as "accommodation to the logic of white dominated capitalist production and consumption" (1992:134).

As I see it Ndebele himself (with South Africa on the brink of a state of emergency) seems not to have been able to look sufficiently deeply beyond the very surfaces which he was concerned to criticise. The black critic's moral opposition to apartheid made the necessary positions very clear: there was no sympathetic understanding to be granted that which repeatedly seemed to announce itself as the "all encompassing privilege" of "white power"; and nor could a case be made for an emergent black middle class which (on the surface, at least) seemed to be caught in the process of assimilation into a discriminatory system. In much of Ndebele's critical writing, then, upwardly mobile or middle class black people have spectacularly 'disappeared', and are implicitly subsumed into the uncritical mimicry of "luxurious life-styles" and "high commodity consumption". In effect, as Morphet (1992) explains, the sympathetic rediscovery of 'the ordinary' is reserved for what Ndebele identifies as the revolutionary class of a rural peasantry. Yet as Morphet goes on to argue, by the mid 1980s the rediscovery of a "pre-modern experience of peasant life in South Africa" – the *peasant* ordinary which is Ndebele's moral exemplar – was somewhat mistaken: Ndebele's pre-modern peasants were cultural hybrids already well-within a post-colonial modernity (1992:138).

In some sense, it is tempting to theorise the (upper) middle class habitus and self-congratulatory symbolic style made visible in *Tribute* as exemplifying Ndebele's criticism of the overly spectacular, uncritical cultural declaration. This self-declarative quality is, on occasions, a criterion through which some of *Tribute*'s readers celebrate the magazine. Take the following response to an issue-oriented 'letter forum' initiated by *Tribute* staff around the topic "black yuppies: success stories or sellouts?"

Standouts, not sellouts

I remember the word 'yuppy' to mean white guys, especially during the reign of PWs and FWs. But today I'm talking about the black yuppy, who entered the venture by storm – and not segregating ladies from this (away with chauvinists, racists and sexists).

Immediately a black yuppy grabs a job, he goes for the most splendid car. I believe two-thirds of them never went abroad and they can't talk either French or Italian but they can demonstrate them by wearing fashions from those countries. To them, summer means wearing the most expensive sunglasses.

These yuppies got class – like *pantsulas* – because one can distinguish them from the rest.

They are outgoing, charming and luxurious

'The Gift, Randburg.' (March 1995:12)

The letter is replete with contradictory impulses and inconsistencies of grammar, none of which *Tribute*'s editorial team has sought to smooth over, and it is these which help to draw my attention away from the apparently superficial to the longed-for, long-in-coming, yet still always-in-the-making ideal of 'better' life possibilities. The nuances of 'The Gift's' subjectivity are not announced in the letter; they escape me, but the contradictions and rough edges hint at the human ordinariness underlying the ostensibly spectacular statement. In another edition of *Tribute*, 'Gudani Davhana, Grahamstown' objects to a claim made by Sandile Memela concerning the lack of social consciousness evident in black professionals.

I am pleased at how Sandile Memela sounded off his irritation at how young black professionals misuse their qualifications instead of directing their innovative energies towards upgrading the lives of fellow blacks. But alas! Memela blows everything out of proportion. He overlooks and downplays some natural phenomenon: that it is inherent in human nature to seek improvement.....

I will here take issue with Memela on his statement that "black professionals who drive posh cars and stay in suburbs are a symptom of a disease which plagues this nation".

Considering the alarming rate of unemployment in this country, Memela is playing the risk of inciting fatal animosity between black professionals and the majority of blacks.

His whole article smacks of immaturish overgeneralisation. He lacks the decency to appreciate other people's successes. Instead, he openly accuses them of "selling out". In doing this, he exposes a colonised mentality of viewing blacks as not belonging in the suburbs. What sort of self-sacrifice is

Memela expecting of black professionals? Living in suburbs is not selling out. It is simply a sign of improvement, which everybody seeks – Memela included. (August 1993:8)

Rebuttals such as these imply that it is difficult to deny the increasing familiarity and aspirational ‘normality’ of a middle class habitus, and that this can only be properly understood through the very ordinariness which Ndebele would prefer to depict as an oppositional counter-position reserved for ‘the revolutionary class’. My point here is not to fabricate a contemporary South African reality which through false moral equation seamlessly homogenises all South Africans’ experience into an assumed ‘western middle classness’. Yet to dismiss under the label ‘spectacular’ the widespread appeal of comfort, security, status, satisfaction and other possible corollaries of social and economic improvement, and to insist that a desire for upward social mobility effaces the desire to effect social change, is to engage in another kind of misrepresentation.

I should admit that Ndebele does on several occasions in his volume of essays make space in his revisionist cultural canon for an interesting conception of the popular which is beyond the rigid, politically correct parameters of ‘resistance’. He refers to widely-enjoyed contemporary urban forms such as township drama and *mbaqanga* (played by musicians like Hugh Masekela and Miriam Makeba). These commercial forms he considers to be “firmly based in the urban popular imagination” (1994:86). Yet he too simply explains away the *commercial* appeal of these forms by insisting that they have become successful commodities precisely because they have *spontaneous* popular origins. As he puts it, their “legitimacy” derives inseparably

from the spontaneous self-consciousness of African urban popular culture...[which] is beyond the easy manipulation of the apartheid culture. The recording companies no doubt attempted, with a large measure of success, to commercialise this music. But that in itself was a recognition of the firm popular foundations of this music. (1994:86-87)

In other words, they are to be easily recognised by the critic as *authentically* popular despite their commodification and implication in “the ethos of the market place” (1994:38), while a magazine such as *Tribute*, by implication, is inauthentic because of a supposedly unequivocal commercial genealogy. I am more cautious, though, about using the appellation ‘spontaneous’ as a moral yardstick of mass-mediated culture: indeed, it is possible to theorise *Tribute* through arguments similar to those which Ndebele reserves for ‘township drama’ and *mbaqanga*. Ndebele’s distinctions remain mere sophistry, unless he is ready to use an equivalent logic to validate those forms of mass periodical culture which are popular with various contemporary black South African audiences.

In short, if we are to take seriously in our theorising of the forms and practices of consumer culture the ordinary experience that is crucial to Ndebele’s cultural theories, is it not germane to consider in all their contradictions the ambiguous subjectivities occasioned by the always-moving interrelations of race, class and capital?

Ndebele might even with a little prodding be persuaded to admit as much. With coaxing, for instance, he might apply to his theorising of black life in relation to commodity culture some of his sympathetic observations concerning a black South African fiction which has been criticised for eschewing obvious political commentary. As Ndebele argues, while critics have been inclined to favour “direct political consciousness” in black fictional characters, we must instead “contend with the fact that even under the most oppressive conditions, people are always trying and struggling to maintain a semblance of normal social order” (1994:55). It is therefore

the transformation of...values [that] constitutes the essential drama in the lives of ordinary people. The range of problems is ordinary enough but constitutes the active social consciousness of most people: will I like my daughter’s boyfriends or prospective husband? how do I deal with my attraction to my friend’s wife? what will my child become? Relatives can be a nuisance; someone I despise has bought

a better car than mine....The list is endless. We are confronted here with the honesty of the self in confrontation with itself. (1994:55)

Much the same case could be made for *Tribute*, were Ndebele to reconceptualise the binary emphases in terms of which he has tended to theorise forms of black South African consumer culture. The ordinary and the spectacular, “absorption” (1994:154) and “the quest for a self-created reality” (1994:154) are not absolutely to be differentiated in the processes through which culture – and daily life – are repeatedly invented. Indeed, we might borrow from Terence Ranger’s essay on ‘invented tradition’ in order to argue that a magazine such as *Tribute* need not be interpreted as the ‘aping’ behaviour of ‘mimic men’, but as the self-conscious adaptation of European symbolism by many black South Africans “in a spirit of fashion, proclaiming their own sophistication...by an impressive display of their ability to keep up to date, to discern the realities of colonial power and to comment shrewdly upon them” (1983:237).

Rather than insisting on a critical perspective which views the products of consumer culture as inevitably typifying the masked, surface orientation of contemporary South African reality (Ndebele 1994:153), the critic might extend to the contexts of mass cultural production and consumption the symbolic, formal and experiential complexity often sequestered for the literary. This would be to work within an analytical framework that takes seriously the political and apolitical contradictions of the ordinary. For instance, in

the world of fashion, beauty contests, sports, of the ‘first African this...the first African that’...we have social data of tremendous significance.... We must begin from the social fact of these data rather than from a moralistic or radical idealism which wishes that people were better than they were, without accepting the responsibility of beginning with and from what they actually are. (1994:94)

Here, the critic uses as his measure an holistic rather than a narrow sense of the political, and cultural identity is imagined to incorporate the perplexing, difficult-to-categorise variety of forms and practices through which people imagine their ‘selves’. The writer is none other than Ndebele, making a case for the 1950s world of *Drum*.

What is most significant for me, here, is that it is only by engaging with the safe distanciation of a mass-mediated popular culture of the *past* that Ndebele can allow himself to be sympathetic to the conceptual and experiential hybridity that makes modern culture in process. He is prepared to develop an argument which allows that *Drum* magazine of the 1950s possessed an invigorating critical-cultural potential on account of its moral, formal and thematic eclecticism being somehow culturally and experientially authentic. But he seems loath (or unable) to concede this capacity to more contemporary forms of consumer culture. As I argue, though, it is through the languages of intensifying syncretism and hybridity, wishfulfilment and actuality, that *Tribute* and many other texts of current South African consumer culture may usefully be understood. *Tribute* may feasibly be considered a commodity which gestures, both consciously and unconsciously, towards the difficulties of an emergent ‘South African’ imaginary: the magazine’s iconography embodies challenges to racist essentialism, for example, even as ‘blackness’ is granted an iconic social power. We are reminded that categories such as ‘race’ – now stable, now fragmented – are both discursively and experientially constituted: sometimes they are mobilised in terms of a mythic homogeneity, while at others they depend on the hybrid potential of heterogeneous claims such as ‘tradition’ and ‘cosmopolitanism’, which may in effect be another form of mythologising the modern black subject position.

Editorial Mandate and Mission Statement

An interesting guide to the editorial mandate informing the content and covers of the magazine is its ‘mission statement’ (explicitly nominated by various editors in this language). Here, I must

quote at length the magazine's "basic principles, the eight cardinal points on which *Tribute* was founded" in 1987, and which have continued to be invoked by editors as a yardstick against which to measure the title's achievements and failures (October 1992:1):

- * The economic and political empowerment of all people of South Africa.
- * The creation of a viable economy on which the country's prosperity will be built.
- * The creation and maintenance of a non-racial, non-sexist and democratic South Africa.
- * The promotion of the development of dynamic black potential.
- * The encouragement of black dignity and independence in all aspects of life.
- * The strengthening of black family and community values.
- * The promotion of the creation of a dynamic education system which will empower South Africa's people to take their rightful positions in society.
- * The enrichment of the lives of the people of South Africa.

As Qwelane reiterates in his editorial, "This is our mission statement, our article of faith, and we wish our readers and history to judge our endeavours against it" (October 1992:1).

The very idea of a mission statement helps one to locate *Tribute* as a South African magazine of the highly politicised late 1980s. At the height of the struggle against white power, it became a widely accepted – and even expected – practice for an institution of liberal-progressive persuasion to produce a document which announced its oppositional stance to apartheid. Yet a mission statement attests to the struggle of contradictory social forces to claim moral agency. Such a public document was at least in some part necessary, one might argue, because the institutions in question – from universities, to publishers, to mega-corporations – seemed, at least at first glance, to be so thoroughly implicated in the racial and capitalist structures of apartheid. The mission statement, then, was a legitimating strategy not dissimilar from forms of corporate advertising, through which management attempts to shape a preferred corporate image, to popularise a positive evaluation of a particular institution in society.

However sceptical we might be of 'the mission statement' as a technology of discursive manipulation and aspirational positioning, though, the genre remains interesting for the ways in which it labours to persuade individuals into forms of imagined community.¹⁸ *Tribute*'s mission statement mixes registers and 'ideals'. For instance, we have Black Consciousness collectivity alongside the non-racial aspirations of the Freedom Charter (an emphasis on black potential, dignity, independence and family alongside a desire for a non-racial future); and we have an attempt to take seriously the role of Capital in the historical exclusion of black South Africans from 'enriched lives', even as a capitalist mode of production is asserted as the chosen route to black empowerment. As *Tribute*'s first editor, Maud Motanyane observes, *Tribute* "came across as slightly schizophrenic....Part-political, but still commercial; part-capitalist; part-Charterist, part-socialist; part-Africanist, part-Black Consciousness, part-liberal, part-conservative...we were all that, and more" (1997:20). In fact *any* issue of *Tribute* is characterised by such diversity. In charting its field of interest, *Tribute*'s editorial team could be seen to draw – sometimes deliberately, sometimes haphazardly – on the images and narrative energies of black pride, black nationalism, capitalism, liberal humanism, African humanism, feminism, civil society, Enlightenment, modernity. This is a curious mix which might prompt a critic to label the journal expediently flexible (trying to be all things to all people), or at best confused (an ideological hotchpotch which obscured rather than made clear the route to democracy). As I have been suggesting, however, another form of response – one that I consider to be valuable – could be shaped if the critic were willing to take critical routes which highlighted the fact that any ideological coherence disseminated in the magazine is temporary, and even illusory.

Firstly (and somewhat pragmatically), a more productive response to *Tribute* might point out that despite an editorial environment which endorses a modified version of capitalism as the

path to 'African advancement', *Tribute*'s contributors are themselves ideologically wide-ranging. Even if we take into consideration only examples of the print media, we find that *Tribute* writers, stylists and photographers are or have also been affiliated to titles as diverse as the *Guardian Weekly*, *Drum*, the *Diamond Fields Advertiser*, the *Sowetan*, *Capital Radio*, the *Financial Mail*, *Beeld* and *Style*. Any ideological coherence in the magazine, then, could reasonably be described as fragmented, and it becomes difficult to speak of 'the magazine' as a single institution of power and control which dupes audiences through apolitical fantasy bribes that deflect their attention from pressing social issues.

Secondly, as I consider more extensively in Chapter 2 on women's magazines, the very phenomenology of magazine reading could be seen to embody repeated negotiations between coherence and fragmentation. Our expectations for – even demands of – any issue of a magazine like *Tribute* invariably include the satisfaction of brief, complete narratives, as 'contained' within the contents list and embodied in our understanding of the editorial ambience. Yet our simultaneous knowledge that the magazine genre is associated with the momentary insight, the brief account, the dispersed attention, a high image frequency and the repeated shift between visual and verbal figures encourages the suspension of teleology attendant upon a never-ending-story. Both dimensions will come into play in the identifications a reader constructs with the magazine text. The discourses of 'race' and 'class' as they appear in *Tribute*, then, cannot but be fluid, shifting, even clashing. And whatever the conscious narratives constructed for consumers by the publishers and editorial teams of a magazine, an analytical reading of *Tribute* in the academic context would need to recognise that even the apparently 'stereotypical' image or print statement does not inevitably convey a coherent, univalent message: depending on how it is mobilised by the reader, a sign may be at once iconoclastic and conventional; meaning inheres not solely in the text but is generated in the varied contexts of reading. Thus we might as researchers be more circumspect about relying on versions of positive/negative binarism in evaluating the images and narratives circulated in a consumer magazine such as *Tribute*. This is hardly a new critical position, but its implications for a sympathetic understanding of the texts of consumer culture remain relatively unexplored in this country. In understanding 'sense' to be both product and process, negotiated between the text and the reader, my own study of *Tribute* might help to cast doubt, for example, on the conventional academic assumption that the 'meaning' and potential of a mass circulation magazine are inherently determined by issues of 'political economy' and 'capitalist exploitation'.

The third route for theorising the discursive eclecticism of a text such as *Tribute* is the one which is most visibly taken in my own Chapter, where I allow that the elusive imagining or conscious negotiating of subjectivity occurs in terms of several positions, now interrelated, now tangential, now antagonistic, now sympathetic. This process, as Cora Kaplan argues (within the somewhat different context of women's writing and socialist feminist criticism) is

not marked by a simple progression from one position or one subjectivity to another. Rather, it is characterised by an oscillation between moments of relative incoherence – the breaking-up of old political languages and positions – and moments when new formulations – often tentative and transitory – are being realised. Nor are these processes of transformation always or even mostly, wilful, argued through, fully conscious realignments. Class [and other social determinants are] 'made' and 'lived' in both conscious and unconscious registers through a variety of languages and practices at any given point in history. (1992:85)

Thus the position of social authority represented by *Tribute*'s mission statement – the editor and team know what is good for you and would convert you to that belief – is rather an authority always-in-the-making: it cannot simply claim ideological purchase but is performatively constructed in the responses which readers make to the magazine.

Something of this is evident in the shifts and tensions which characterise *Tribute's* engagements with 'race' as an all-too-familiar South African signifier. To cite a small, possibly even inconsequential example of what I mean: it is not unusual for personal pronouns and possessive adjectives in *Tribute* editorials and columns to be extremely unstable – 'we' and 'our,' for instance, are constructed at one point as black, at another as non-racial, depending on the perspective of the writer, the subject matter, and the particular apportioning of praise and blame. There seems to be a struggle to find an appropriate voice (or group of voices) through which to articulate forms of contemporary black South Africanness, especially once a newly enfranchised black majority is simultaneously charged with the responsibility of realising a non-racial democracy.

Qwelane makes this explicit in an editorial of late 1993 where he urges *Tribute* readers that the

old order must give way to the new, and in that respect black South Africans have a responsibility to reassure jittery whites that the 'new' South Africa need not mean corruption, nepotism, intolerance, discredited economic policies, and the murder of political opponents. White South Africans also have a responsibility to reassure blacks that this time change is for real and not apartheid by another name and in a more sophisticated guise. We can succeed if we start by committing and dedicating ourselves to the basic values of common humanity and common decency to one another.

It will not be easy, but it is not impossible. (September 1993:1)

During Qwelane's stints as editor, he attempted to circulate a narrative of black achievement even while promoting a non-racial ethic, both of which intersected with a wider foregrounding in the magazine as a whole of 'race' as a contentious contemporary South African discourse. Illustrative of this foregrounding is the slogan or legend. As I have indicated, the title was launched in 1987 under the slogan "A Tribute to Black Excellence". But correspondence featured in the letters pages highlights readers' heated views concerning the initial slogan, as well as subsequent modulations to "A Tribute to Excellence", "A Tribute to Black Excellence" (again), "A Symbol of Excellence", "Who Knows It, Feels It", "A Controversial Issue" and "A Decade of Excellence". Qwelane entered the fray in an editorial of mid 1993

[W]hy, readers have queried, are we still hankering after 'black' when the country is moving towards a less race conscious future?...finally, we are convinced our readers have a point...the question of race is not foremost on our agenda for the magazine. What is, without doubt, is that we intend to be involved – and to involve our readers – in the search for solutions to our vexing myriad of problems as an emergent society". (June 1993:1)

Several letters pointed to the potential contradictions associated with "A Tribute to Black Excellence" and the generally liberal-reconstructive editorial ethos of the magazine. The writers of other letters, such as Vuyisa Qunta of the Black Consciousness Movement of Azania, urged the editor to remain true to the original *black* inspiration of the title, since after

all those who do not want to hear that the colonised, oppressed, and degraded have specific and peculiar needs and interests, can always go and read magazines which pretend that there is no conflict of interests between us and baas Enlightened Fitzsimmins....If your journal abandons its foundation rest assured black readers who are the only ones who count in terms of circulation, will abandon you. In addition no 'non-racial' readers will come on board. (September 1993:9)

Some, like Moses Boyilane in the letters page of January 1995, felt the slogan "A Controversial Issue" to be trivial. In response, though, Elizabeth Matsebula argued that it was "a conscientising concept": "*Tribute* strikes a balance by stressing the importance of utilising human abilities to build society and highlighting the achievements of Africans in spite of their deprivation and oppression" (March 1995:13).

If letters pages are anything to go by (in Chapter 2 on women's magazines I discuss in detail some of the problems associated with treating this magazine subgenre as a source of 'truth' about either readers or texts), *Tribute* readers seem at least to be alert to the contested nature of racial

discourses in contemporary South Africa, and the magazine explicitly constructs 'race' as a South African signifier that is at once significant and unimportant. I am inclined to argue, then, that if *Tribute* has positioned itself in the periodical market in terms of 'black excellence' it does not endorse race as an inert, foundational concept.

In some sense, *Tribute*'s targeting of an urban, black middle class constituency (and its success in visually marketing the signs of such a group) could be seen as a strategic version of 'narrowcasting' that intersects with Black Consciousness forms of address. The term 'narrowcasting' (rather than 'broadcasting'), I borrow from the vocabulary of American cable television. It refers to the deliberate tailoring of material to appeal to a specific, or narrow section of the audience and to advertisers interested in this particular consumer type. In *Tribute*, we can connect this to the repeated affirmations of professional black achievement, and to the idealising of educated, even corporate forms of 'black identity'. Considered very specifically, the intended niche of *Tribute*, as editor Jon Qwelane reminded readers in an early 1990s editorial, was fundamentally that of "leadership" (October 1992:1). This exists within both indicative and injunctive moods, identifying an existing quality within readers, *and* persuading them that as professional black people their social role entails active and exceptional agency on behalf of others. Whatever the unifying racial narrative, however, there is an interesting tension here between discourses of the individual and the collective: each person is encouraged to view him or herself as outstanding, but at the same time to immerse this status in the aspirations of a long-repressed group, sometimes imagined fairly specifically as a 'black middle class' and at others as 'black people' more generally. While the magazine therefore in some sense 'narrowcasts', it also *broadcasts* 'leadership' as a social function which should increasingly be a capacity identified and encouraged in all black people as 'human resource'.¹⁹

Consider the following. The issue of improved black 'lifestyle' in all its excesses, aspirations and ordinariness both makes and is made by the magazine. If the content of *Tribute* is any indicator, black professional and economic achievers increasingly feel themselves to be subject to mass scrutiny. The subject position of 'black professional' responds by explaining itself to itself and to others, (re)articulating in the process a potentially innumerable variety of subjectivities. (This occurs within the pages of *Tribute* every month, as well as across the range of titles addressed to South African consumers, and through other 'media' – whether traditional media like television and radio, or media understood in the more dispersed sense of shopping centre, club or professional society.) Faced by real or imagined questions such as: "Is your lifestyle characterised by ostentatious excess, by self-control, by an indifference to others? What do you do in return for those structures (whether 'family', 'community' or 'constituency' that helped to empower you? Do you betray people's expectations through maladministration and financial corruption, or even through self-indulgence?" *Tribute* answers variously by justifying, exploring and criticising, in the process 'modelling' for its readers, as it were, as range of possible – and preferred – social behaviours. What has become clear in my work on *Tribute* is that middle class and upper middle class 'lifestyle' is a marker of social identity which is ambivalently interpreted: it is often at once the object of criticism, and the object of desire. Black professionals in general are the objects of praise and emulation, even as they are urged to address (or *redress*) the continuing injustices of the system through which they have advanced so that other black people may also enjoy the benefits of an upwardly mobile 'lifestyle'.

Far from simply – and sensationally – flaunting elite exemplars of black success, then, *Tribute* has a relationship with upward mobility that may be described as agonistic and agonised. On the one hand the magazine seems to urge black South Africans, in particular, to consider ownership, wealth, success and so on to be the right and inevitable by-products of self-

application, and a flagrant repudiation of an apartheid social hierarchy in which black people were preferably to be nothing but hewers of wood and drawers of water. This is an attitude which refuses to sentimentalise ‘the township’ as a metonym for all that is vibrant, humane and authentic in black South African culture, and seeks to discover positive attributes in the professionalisation and suburbanisation of black South African life. Yet on the other hand, many of the editorials, feature articles and readers’ letters seem to be riven by a residual guilt about those black people who have been ‘left behind’, and indeed seem to convey that mobility brings with it a perverse sense of loss. The magazine keeps returning to issues of black upward mobility, keeps having to explain black people’s upward mobility to them. If success is glamorised in the magazine, it is not without a sobering sense of the ambivalence, for the black person, of distinctiveness, achievement and excellence.

Letters Pages, a Public Sphere and Civil Society

If there are limits to the magazine’s attempt to broadcast preferred social ideals, it remains the case that *Tribute* seeks to encourage all of its readers not only to feel entitled to prosperity, good education and equal rights, but to recognise that they have a degree of individual agency despite the structural constraints and inequalities of ‘the system’. It is the letters pages, in particular, which most overtly allow readers to express an imagined connection with the magazine and with the discourses of social reconstruction which it endorses. Benjamin in his essay on “The Work of Art” claimed that “the daily press opening to its readers space for ‘letters to the editor’” allowed for an increasing number of readers to become writers, if only occasional ones (1970:234). Similarly, as Nordenger argues in his work on Zimbabwean periodicals and their negotiation of group and individual identities, the “scale of participation in public discourse” through actions such as letter writing may be limited, but the labour of letter-writing is a form of public engagement, as is “the reading of letters that ‘could have been yours’” (1993:138).

The letters pages in *Tribute* invite readers to submit letters on subject matters of their choice and also use what has become a familiar convention of the magazine genre – the awarding of a small sum of money or a prize (initially R50, then R250, now a limited-edition Cross pen) to what is considered by the editorial team to be “the best letter of the month”. Clearly, such a practice relates to the discursive construction of both the magazine and its implied readership. (That the magazine is not beyond rebuke for its serious attempt to educate readers into preferred modes of conduct and belief is suggested in Qwelane’s characteristically iconoclastic remark that “Our readers write to *Tribute*, some to tell us that we are getting it together, and others to tell us where to get off” [April 1993:2].)

Especially interesting as an indicator of the editorial environment and emphases being shaped for the magazine is the ‘Topic of the Month’ strategy inaugurated in late 1993. In this convention, a ‘topic’ – often topical in the sense of being immediately in the local news – is set by the editorial staff, and readers are asked to give their views in the next edition of the magazine. Often, guidelines are offered in order to initiate ideas and to encourage readers into a form of civic agency through which they, by magazine proxy, take a form of personal responsibility for the debates shaping the country. (A fixed issue is not provided every month; only when current affairs suggest areas of contention in relation to which people may wish to have their say in a public forum.) Topics have included:

- * The Lost Generation? (August 1993)
- * The great *lobola* debate (June 1994)
- * English: international gateway, or white bastion? (December 1994)
- * Who should be the head of the household? Is it still the man? (July 1995)

- * Industrial Action: what forms should it take, when is it justified, is it essential to rectify injustice – or is it ruining the economy? (August 1995)
- * Should prostitution and the possession of dagga be legalised? (September 1996)
- * Amnesty: yes, no, maybe? (September 1997)
- * What does it mean to be an African? (August 1997)

The topic of the month strategy, then, usefully presents to readers a number of clearly-defined ideological set pieces. Although the analogy is not completely accurate, it seems fair to maintain that this letters page convention borrows from the medium of formal verbal debate. It requires participants to direct attention to a particular issue, to restrict the length of their submissions and, in published form, the responses are regularly able to be identified (*have already been identified* for the readers) as vehemently for and passionately against. Not inconsequential, either, is the decision sometimes taken by the editorial staff to grant winning-letter status to the correspondent who manages in the most subtle ways to highlight the moral-conceptual complexity of the issue at hand. This relatively disciplined form of participatory structure is intended, I imagine, to convey a point about the willingness and ability of 'the *Tribute* reader' to enter sociopolitical and sociocultural debate. While any topics may apparently be aired on the *Tribute* letters page, the fact that such liberal-pluralism works in conjunction with the more formal practice of a 'set topic' also functions to give a loose conceptual structure to the overwhelming heteroglossia and rampantly democratic character of the letters page as a print subgenre. By extension, it simulates in a rudimentary way the idealised South African reality of an engaged 'community', in which people are not merely democratically free to express their views, but are willing to submit themselves to the necessary forms of social control (which are at once a voluntary form of *exchange*) through which 'society' is urged into being.

There are possibilities here for producing an academic reading of *Tribute* through notions such as 'the public sphere'. Yet as the following discussion might indicate, this cannot entail merely the superimposition onto the text of an apparently obvious concept. I am unable to give great detail here, but merely wish to outline some of the critical rethinkings that I consider to be required in the academic reading of *Tribute* as a text of consumer culture.

Let me rather simplistically condense Habermas's (1989) idea of the public sphere. He seeks to trace the historical lineage of a category central to modern life, 'public opinion', and in doing so (re)constitutes the notion of an eighteenth century bourgeois public sphere. In a London of the 1700s, he argues, such social institutions of the literate bourgeoisie as clubs, coffee-houses (of which there were more than 3000) and salons, in conjunction with a growing and increasingly free press, fostered the formation of a critical forum where topical events and matters of political policy could be discussed independently from the official structures of court and state. We might wish to borrow his idea in order to claim that *Tribute* fulfils an analogous function in late-twentieth-century South African society, for on many occasions editors of the title have represented it to its audience in terms of the kinds of discussion through which 'South African society' can be brought into being. Such debate occurs in the text, mediated through convention of the periodical press, *and* beyond its pages. For example, *Tribute*'s management have established regular discussion lunches in the major cities, as well as charitable funds and radio programmes offering business advice. Textwise: *Tribute* has staged simulated elections, inviting readers – most of whom would historically have been denied the vote – to elect the party of choice. Accompanying this drive, importantly, was a welter of material designed to educate readers in the range of political opinion and practice available to them. As Nokwande Sithole observed when she was editor

We like to see ourselves as a lifestyle magazine but believe our readers have a social conscience. I'd like the magazine to be a forum of debate, not only in politics but in social issues as well.

Tribute comments on the loss of social fabric in our community. Its repair is as important as finding a political solution. (February 1991:1)

Yet as the second part of this quotation might remind us, part of Habermas's project is to point to the disintegration of what he considers to be the 'truly' public sphere under the conditions of modernity, which give rise to a "great mass of consumers" which is characterised by a "receptiveness [which] is public but uncritical" (1989:175). Thus it is inaccurate simply to transfer Habermas's notion of a public sphere to the context of *Tribute*, which is an instance of precisely the commercialisation of public opinion that he seeks to counter. Habermas tends, at least in the volume under discussion, to follow rather too closely for my comfort the old Frankfurt School critique of a manipulative culture industry, arguing that the forms of reasoning instrumental in the mass media are necessarily inferior to those of serious, critical discussion in an eighteenth-century public sphere. Indeed if Habermas himself qualifies his idealised concept of public opinion – it was never completely realised on account of class and gender distinctions – he attributes a large part of the failure to the presses' tendency towards commercialisation (1989).

Yet instead of simply discarding the idea of a public sphere in relation to *Tribute*, (especially since an enduring aspect of the editorial mandate seems to be the encouraging of a version of this critical capacity), I have tried to understand its weaknesses and then re-imagine the idea differently. It is criticism of Habermas's notion of a public sphere that may direct us to useful reformulations: his is an overly abstract model of the "egalitarian interaction of rational citizens" (Outhwaite 1994:11); it is insufficiently materialist; it inclines towards homogeneity; and it describes what was in fact an expressly fraternal social contract. Working from such objections, one might re-think 'the public sphere' in relation to *Tribute*. For instance, if *Tribute* makes and makes visible forms of 'public sphere', a researcher needs to allow the quirky refractions of 'the public' that inevitably occur in the crumpled forms of consumer culture: at one point in the magazine public opinion might be invoked as if self-evident and free from obvious ideological inscription, while at another the magazine actively engages in the negotiating of precisely that 'public' through which it wishes to authenticate itself and/or to distance itself from particular actions and ideas, whether on the part of a government, or an individual. Similarly, as I have already indicated, 'the public sphere' as debated in *Tribute* can be variously imagined as narrow or broad: sometimes the boundaries may be primarily and explicitly drawn through discourses of race and class ("A Tribute to *Black Excellence*", my italics) which imagine a black professional readership, yet at the same time, in another section of the magazine, 'the public' addressed by the text and visual images could be *all* black people idealised as community or even *all South Africans* as a heterotopian, nascently national collective. Viewed in this way, *Tribute*'s 'public sphere' is heterogeneous in the extreme, even as it is also subject to various homogenising impulses that may emanate from the compilers of the magazine, and/or from those who make use of the text. In sum, let me suggest that a public sphere as it is manifest in and through *Tribute* may work obliquely rather than closely with Habermas's initial idea, for the magazine is not able to be theorised solely through the coherently rational, reasonable impetus that Habermas envisages for his eighteenth-century reading public and nor does it show unqualified respect for boundaries between public and private. (Even read conversely, as I have been suggesting, 'the Market' cannot be said to form the rapaciously deterministic logic of a consumer text such as *Tribute*.) If *Tribute* sometimes consciously urges readers in a particular direction, it is difficult to discover in the text as 'a whole' a completely thought-through, cogently-deliberated conception of 'the public' and 'public responsibility': as relevant as conscious strategy and debate are haphazard relations, felt and imagined, which evade research agendas.

An equally pertinent concept in generating a critical reading of *Tribute* is that of 'civil society'. But as is the case with 'the public sphere', it needs to be creatively mobilised, its relevances sought out, rather than simply assumed. I cannot here explore the varied conceptions of civil society as they have been developed by influential philosophers such as Hegel, Marx and Gramsci. My own use in the context of this Chapter most closely resembles the negotiated, tripartite structure envisaged by Gramsci, where civil society is an intermediary realm between the state and the market, even as it is constantly fluid in being the space in which struggles over meaning and agency are enacted. (The increasing tendency towards corporate sponsorship cannot but call into question any idea of absolutely distinct realms of civil society and market.)

Useful in relation to 'civil society' and the press has been Nordenger's work on periodicals in Zimbabwe (1993), even though I find him somewhat imprecise and unself-consciously contradictory. In his article, "Constituting Oppositional Discourses: Civil Society and the Role of Popular Magazines in Zimbabwe" (1993), Nordenger disputes the long-standing tendency to dismiss mass-cultural texts like the 'popular magazine' as vehicles for a manipulative consumer culture industry. On the contrary, such texts (much like the ANC-affiliated civic associations that arose in South African township communities during the late-1980s), may play a complex role in allowing people to 'negotiate' the civil imaginary. Borrowing from Nordenger's particularised definition of 'civil society', the critic may look upon *Tribute* as representing "interest groups, or discourses of interested consciousness" (1993:132) such as 'Penta Publications' or 'an aspirant black bourgeoisie' or 'a media profession', yet these vested interests will not be coherent or secure in either expressing or achieving their goals. Rather, they will constantly be placed in shifting relations with other forms of power. Thus "popular magazines are part of a national public discourse that addresses issues on the national political agenda, and presents analytical articles with expressly oppositional interpretations" (Nordenger 1993:124).

Yet very importantly, Nordenger emphasises that he is not conceiving of 'power' as an obviously oppositional force. (This despite the fact that his own purpose in the paper is to challenge – to oppose – theses of mass cultural manipulation which insist on an audience's blind adoption of dubious values.) As he puts it: "The term is used in order to signify that meanings are constantly negotiated in any given society" (Nordenger 1993:145). As significant is Nordenger's struggle to allow that the inevitably ideological ideal of a civil society will not necessarily depend on coherent argument, or even on those discursive fields conventionally considered political. He explains that whatever the vested interests being served by popular magazines, these texts

are simultaneously creating and representing discourses at other levels, that concern other spheres of Zimbabwean society. They thus become mediators between different spheres of society. They seem to have developed a peculiar and wide editorial mix, with articles on topics from the most private realms of life to the uttermost [*sic*] public domain. (1993:125)

Accordingly, an audience's interest in traditionally private realms

should by no means be looked upon as contrary or irrelevant to the creation of oppositional discourses. These discourses can be characterised as broadly cultural, mediating a modern concept of 'leisure time' or cultural activity in a private sphere.... These discourses are important in constituting cultural identity and self-awareness, and may be expected to create various levels of interested consciousness. (Nordenger 1993:138)

If an important dynamic in *Tribute* is the imagining of a civil society through the encouragement of debate in the form of letters and editorials, then, this function may equally as feasibly be implied in less overtly political forms, as in the celebration and critique of influential individuals, structures and events, or even in the very forms of 'lifestyle' and 'professional' image which make up a significant proportion of the magazine's page count. As in the case of 'the public sphere', therefore, I have found the concept of 'a civil society' useful in relation to the forms of

discourse iterated in and through *Tribute*, but I could not simply envisage polarised relations between explicitly oppositional cultural discourses which are construed as positively resistant, and more elusive and even evasive negotiations of identity premised on ostensible co-optation. Adding influence to such a position is the work on African periodicals of Sonja Laden. In an unpublished paper on “national consciousness” in magazines aimed at a black South African bourgeoisie, Laden makes the point that

a cultural, rather than ‘national’ type of homogenization seems to be taking place in South Africa, which appears to elide, and perhaps even subvert, accepted forms of nationalism and nationalist sensibilities. This process of cultural homogenization could be viewed as a process of integration whereby an array of heterogeneous communities and their often conflicting social and cultural patterns are reconciled. More specifically, I believe that a whole new range of urban cultures and lifestyles being reformulated by the black population in South Africa today, indicates that black South Africans currently have a stronger desire for ‘cultural solidarity’ than for ‘cultural difference’ or ‘black nationalism’. (no date a:3)

If there are homogenising tendencies in her argument, and an implicit tendency towards either/or binarisms of “cultural solidarity” *rather* than “black nationalism”, Laden at least seems to be insisting that any conception of a ‘public sphere’ and a ‘civil society’ that is to be associated with a magazine like *Tribute* needs to be thought of not simply as political or oppositional, but as articulated through the discourses of lifestyle, identity, cultural affiliation and personal meaning. My observation, here, is to repeat that *Tribute* depends on a discursive dynamic in which race and class, the public and the private, politics and the domestic are variously mobilised, such that apparently valid distinctions between entities and concepts are thrown into question. We would do well even to extend such observations beyond *Tribute* to the volatile nature of human life as it is lived within consumer culture more broadly. David Chaney’s work, for instance, part of a growing theorisation of lifestyle as a valid and powerful category of contemporary social identity, suggests that instead of only lamenting the loss of a classical model of the public sphere (one destroyed, in part, through its absorption into an international mass culture of powerful media mega-corporations), it is crucial to perceive the concomitant: that innovative strategies of mass communication are reworking the structures of lived experience for mass audiences by complicating conventional notions of public and private, political and domestic, and, therefore, relevant and irrelevant (1993 and 1996).

Theorising ‘High Society’

In the light of my necessarily brief discussion of concepts such as the ‘public sphere’ and ‘civil society’, let me look at *Tribute*’s ‘Society’ section, recently renamed ‘Scene Around Town’. Following the practice of magazines such as the South African *Style* and the British *Tatler*, these pages feature people at the kind of social, sporting and cultural functions that are typically considered those of ‘high society’. Given the punning, figurative language and the glossy images, we might well ask what forms of cultural solidarity and cultural difference are being represented? How is the public envisaged? And how do its polite civility and urbanity encapsulate the forms of an imagined civil society?

As is the stock-in-trade of the genre, *Tribute*’s society pages display glamorous weddings, launches, galas, elite corporate social functions, twenty-first birthdays and dinner-dances. I have had to limit the examples which follow, but at the same time have wanted to give a reasonably full sense of the kind of events covered. Further, I have tried to list events randomly, rather than cautiously seeking out only particular forms of social occasion. Events photographed for the society pages include wedding ceremonies and receptions (September 1989 and April 1996), the most dramatic instance being a 4-page photo spread of the formal and traditional ceremonies and

reception of the “wedding of the decade”, Zinzi Mandela to Zweli Hlongwane (December 1992); wine tastings (September 1992); the African Life Tennis tournament (September 1988); the Cripple Care Conference (September 1988); the lavish relaunch gala of the SABC (South African Broadcasting Corporation) at Waterkloof Airbase (April 1996); ceremonies for the Amstel Playwright of the Year, and for the Bertrams’ VO Award for African Literature (February 1993); film previews (September 1989) and cinema openings (September 1988); book launches and restaurant openings (September 1989 and June 1993); the launch of the *Tribute* charity trust fund to assist the RDP, and the launch of the *Tribute*-initiated home for needy children in Gauteng (December 1994); the opening of Ngema’s play *Sarafina!* (September 1992); the graduation of nurses from UNISA (September 1992), and various *Tribute* Forums in Durban, Cape Town and Johannesburg, at which speakers such as Dr Oscar Dhlomo and Cyril Ramaphosa address topical issues such as “Optimising KwaZulu-Natal’s Potential” and “Mobilising Capital and Expertise for the New Site of Struggle” (September 1996).

What might happen were we to compare the images which habitually make up *Tribute*’s urbane society pages with the generic equivalent in the black consumer magazine *Pace*? *Pace* carries a few pages headed ‘People’, where the naif posing and exceptional ordinariness of the snapshots submitted by readers possess the quality of ‘poor theatre’, a quality increased by the graininess of the relatively unsophisticated ‘mechanical reproduction’ and cheap paper stock. Drawing on the arguments of both Benjamin (1970) and eminent South African literary-cultural critics such as Michael Chapman (1991 and 1992), we might initially wish to make a claim for *Pace*’s practice as more democratic and progressive than *Tribute*’s, since the exceptional privations of black South African life are imaginatively and humanly captured in the ordinary poses, texture and ‘primitive’ technologies of the *Pace* images. We might argue that this appositely refuses to glamorise consumption as a means through which the redistribution of excess may be effected. Can we really say, though, which images offer better testimony to readers’ lives and aspirations?

Answers to this question of relevance and authenticity in relation to *Tribute*’s society pages can be proposed if we discuss (a) an occasional tactic used by the magazine in the society pages, and then (b) return to the tactics which are more regularly used as a structure. Occasionally there appears on the society pages an insert headed “CALLING ALL SOCIALITES!”, through which *Tribute* readers are invited to “take pictures of yourselves for publication in *Scene Around Town*” (eg. July 1994). My preceding description of *Pace* photographs ought to suggest that this tactic cannot be understood merely as a sales ploy, an instance of the manipulated, commercially-produced public derided by Habermas. Instead, the publication of readers’ photos – images not solely *of* them, visually representing them, but emanating *from* them – offers particularly pertinent ‘popular’ moments of recognition that function beyond the economic motive. We would have to admit that the balance of power in such discourses remains tilted in favour of the commercial structure which produces the text: even the selection of photographs will be subject to the gatekeeping strategies which many theorists of media argue are fundamental to mass-mediated technologies such as television news. Yet one could still argue that the consumer of *Tribute* is through small moments such as these *materially* able to produce the meanings which the magazine may have for him/her as an individual. I find myself returning to Benjamin as he appears in his renowned essay of 1936, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”. Whatever his over-optimistic claims for the democratic powers of technology (which sit awkwardly with moments in which he critiques the “illusion-promoting spectacles” [1970:234] of a commercialised culture), he does speculate that “the newsreel offers everyone the

opportunity to rise from passer-by to movie extra. In this way any man might even find himself in a work of art....Any man today can lay claim to being filmed" (1970:233).

Such theorisings as I offer above are all well and good, yet still another matter demands facing. Why is it, for instance, that I find myself wanting to recuperate the ostensibly 'self-produced' images in *Tribute* and *Pace* as especially relevant? Why consider them more 'authentic' and less mediated expressions of self than the images generated by a photographer in the employ of the magazine? My wish can largely be characterised as an anxious response to those still very influential and sceptical critical discourses that discount the active role of the consumer in making consumer culture, and hence drive critics like myself to 'discover' minor moments of at least partially visible consumer agency in the machine of the reifying culture industry.

The fact is, though, that even the regular 'Scene Around Town' society pages in *Tribute* may have quirky meanings that are not immediately announced to the researcher. The poses – smiling socialites sharing conversation, company, food, alcohol – are those that consumers have come to understand as constituting moments of collective life within the flow of mass-mediated contemporaneity. Taken individually, the images are for the most part forgettable – unless you or someone you recognise are featured in the shot, when you are likely to have a specific form of emotional investment in what is otherwise an 'undistinguished' image able to be replaced by another of its genre. Yet when viewed collectively (across several pages), and repeatedly (as a convention of the lifestyle title), the prolific images accrue psychosocial significance. Especially when considered in the context of *Tribute* as a black South African magazine, the middle-class social stereotype resonates with a defamiliarising aura which gives bodily, human presence to a sophisticated black 'life-carrying-on' as usual. It is difficult not to argue that in the photographs, South Africans of all shades of so-called blackness are constituting the kind of *mass* mass-mediated 'black' iconography that has tended to be absent from the body of mainstream media produced by Apartheid-derived publishing infrastructures. The images entail the making public of a new image of a public sphere.

This may be read not only through discourses of race and class, but of gender. The society pages are repeatedly populated with images of black women, images sometimes quotidian, sometimes spectacular. There are ordinary women in functional clothes workshopping a gender forum – yet they are distinguished from a traditionally-assumed black female ordinary of 'woman in the background' both by the very image which foregrounds their activity and by a caption along the lines of 'sisters with clout'. There are glamorous women socialising with ease in what might well be designer gowns, giving the lie to the assumed constraint of black female domesticity. If the society pages partly perpetuate the kinds of female images habitually denigrated as negative by certain schools of feminism – models, social 'butterflies', media personalities – I cannot disallow that the meanings attributed to the images are exactly that: attributed, and available for re-energising within the parameters of other ideologies.

White people, too, are on occasions represented in the society pages. Although this could be theorised as the production by a black-run mass media of a white 'other', we might also perceive in such images the magazine's encouraging of a symbolic civil society characterised by black and white people's ease of physical and ideological mingling, rather than by racial tension, hostility and criminality. The pages can even be read as a momentary realisation, in images of polite social recreation, of a race-less, financially equitable 'utopia' or more eclectic 'heterotopia'. The fact that the discourses need repeating and re-realising each month attests not in any singular way to the *failure* of South Africans to realise a 'better way of life'; it also points to the infinitely on-going processes in which human beings, despite attaining the slogan of democracy, long to

make real a rhetorical form. As many cultural commentators are beginning to recognise, it is this kind of gap between the yearned-for and the real that needs to be factored into cultural analysis, instead of merely dismissed as false consciousness. It is not surprising, given the various possibilities for recuperating the society pages, that I am not confident in labelling any of the images either ordinary or spectacular, progressive or reactionary. I cannot delineate with any precision the 'objective' contours of co-option and resistance, spectacle and ordinariness involved in specific sections of the consumer magazine genre.

Much of this Chapter has sought to argue that beyond any supposedly obvious 'democratic' forms of legitimacy to be found in the images of society pages, value may be discovered by the reader (and hence the researcher) in even those areas of *Tribute* which might more conventionally be considered merely 'co-opted'. Whatever their mass-produced imagery, it is feasible to consider the society pages of a consumer magazine a small, 'domestic' sphere of influence or 'local centre' of knowledge. This "is not to trivialise or privatise the public sphere, but rather to recognise that: 'the sitting-room is exactly where we need to start from, if we finally want to understand the constitutive dynamics of abstractions such as "the community" or "the nation"' (Morley 1992:283). I understand that Morley's own research concerns television audiences; yet it seems useful to conceptualise *Tribute* through some of the subtle correctives he offers concerning both coercive structural authority and the supposedly undifferentiated 'mass' composition of the mass-media audience. Arguments for the personal, intimate, and intricate forms in which power may be manifest, or even latent, in the relations that give meaning to a periodical might make researchers less willing to assume their unmediated intellectual ability to enunciate either text or audience.

Overall, I suppose, the extent to which one will find *Tribute*'s glossy auratic confidence a mark of critical cultural intervention or of assimilation into a banal commercialisation will depend on one's positioning. And the mass: popular equation, as I have been suggesting, is notoriously difficult to 'read'. Even without declaring where one stands in relation to the formation of what is variously considered to be a post-apartheid elite or an increasingly common aspirational norm, my discussion of *Tribute* raises the awkward matter of value for those who claim their field to be 'the description' of contemporary culture. Whatever the most liberal of intellectuals would prefer to believe, we neither value nor reject all mass culture equally: *Twin Peaks* is interesting, but *Loving* is trivial? *Tribute* is worthwhile, but *True Love* is dubious? Within our hierarchies of popular cultural value, there is a tendency *not* to value cultural forms primarily in terms of their mass appeal; our criteria for popular cultural value do not necessarily emphasise the *numbers* of people who 'use' any cultural product. Yes, certainly, any text may be constructed as an object of study, but some examples inevitably strike different people as being more worthwhile than others. And whatever the claims of reader response initiatives, the English Studies preference is often reserved for texts that seem to position themselves slightly above what we continue to regard as the pedestrian, ordinary, indiscriminating intelligence. The morally instructive dynamic associated with the teaching context, it seems, leads English Studies academics to delineate some mass cultural products as relatively superior or progressive, and hence susceptible to a diagnostic pleasure. Perhaps we are motivated by an unconscious need to confirm the superior 'academic' imaginary?

The problem of attributing value brings me back to the difficulty of theorising *Tribute* in relation to other South African magazines which target a black audience. Let me return to *Drum* and its critical reception in order to make my point.

As this Chapter has already indicated, if South African literary-cultural critics have tended to ignore the form of the popular periodical (whatever the race of its intended readership), *Drum*

is the one title to have enjoyed prolific critical attention. An especially influential work within English Studies is Chapman's (1989) volume of stories from *Drum* during the 1950s, which is complemented by a substantial essay. What becomes evident, though, is that Chapman's primary interest lies not in the context and format of the popular magazine *per se*, but in *Drum* of the 1950s as the source of innovative South African short stories.²⁰

In recovering *Drum* as a "socioliterary phenomenon of the 1950s", Chapman identifies the magazine as the cradle of black South African short fiction, arguing that it provided an outlet for the nascent talents of black writers. Chapman's volume is in many respects admirable. His approach illustrates the capacity of short fiction to incorporate the registers of both imaginative symbolism and journalistic documentary, as well as the need to read any notion of the literary out of and back into the details of sociohistorical context. In effect, though, despite Chapman's excellent appendix to the anthology which contextualises the stories and life stories, and reproduces some of the advertising images from the magazine, the anthology *The 'Drum' Decade: Stories from the 1950s* is just that: an anthology which privileges the discourses of literary-creative endeavour. It displaces *Drum* as consumer magazine into inverted commas, managing the text's rampant discursive hybridity through the relatively restricted codes of fictional production. The overwhelming generic emphasis on the *short story* form deflects attention from the composite magazine context of which the *Drum* stories are only a part. Even beyond Chapman's individual study, I am tempted to believe that had *Drum* not been characterised by an unusually 'imaginative' ethos, one which spectacularly flagged moments in which the magazine appeared to declare its *distance* from the processes of commodification, *Drum* would have elicited from academe the habitual disdain reserved for mass culture. My suspicion is confirmed when I recognise that if there has been a substantial body of academic and journalistic work which has sought to unearth for a South African public the 'lost world' of *Drum* in the 1950s, only occasionally is it even mentioned that the title continues to appear. The assumption seems to be that *then Drum* was an exception to the "compliant attitude" (Tomaselli and Tomaselli 1987:48) which characterised the 'black' press; whereas *now* it "gives little hint of the journalistic heights it attained in its heyday" (Addison 1978:3). In fact, *Drum* and other contemporary magazines like *Tribute* continue to field stories with an investigative slant, even though the topics under inquiry might be considered by the magazines' detractors to be 'soft' rather than 'hard'.

The tendency for critics to scorn contemporary periodicals for a black readership has a not inconsequential theoretical implication which is seldom foregrounded in the forms of cultural research carried out in departments of English or in 'Cultural Studies'. The implication is that if *Tribute*, rather than *Drum*, appeals to me as a critic, this should be attributed not to the shortcomings or superior qualities of the text, but to my own *preferences* and *expectations* concerning what constitutes worthwhile cultural capital. Let me explore this by considering two intersecting matters. Firstly, I suggest several areas of overlap between *Drum*'s original preoccupations and the *Tribute* mandate. Secondly, I debate 'the literary' as an imagined aspect of *Tribute*'s appeal. My discussion highlights the difficulties faced by a researcher when she tries to legitimate her critical interest in the supposed distinctiveness of a particular title. I argue that whatever the continuing interest of *Drum* for its target readership, it is *Tribute* which has more closely addressed my own interests, and in registers that are at once familiar and tweaked into subtle newness. It is important, here, that *Tribute* has drawn me within its ambit partly on account of its use of familiar discourses of 'Englishness' and 'literariness', yet the magazine's format as eclectic consumer document has also prompted me to understand 'the literary' as but one discourse among many.

***Drum* and *Tribute*: Complex Intersections**

Drum in the 1950s favoured what Sampson refers to as “[c]heesecake, crime, animals, babies” (1956:27). Yet with its English copy, its literary interests, its satirically critical tone, and its investigative journalism, the magazine was able to capture the attention of both a newly urbanising African population, and of a small, but visible black ‘elite’. In its present weekly form, *Drum* might be said by many critics to have forfeited even an implicitly political dimension. It is marketed in a recent Nasionale Pers campaign as being the ‘black’ ‘general interest’ equivalent of the English *You* and the Afrikaans *Huisgenoot*. Hunt Lascaris media analyst Lyndall Campher argues that the weekly *Drum* has the biggest growth prospects of any South African periodical (1997a), but the content of *Drum* is often bizarre to me: I picked up an issue in which ghosts attacking a household, a baby with three legs, and insect burgers served at a Washington club, appear alongside articles on the murdered Chris Hani and the Presidential inauguration. Yet I cannot definitively declare that *Drum* is ‘inferior’ to *Tribute*.

Perhaps the magazine’s tabloid-type content is not necessarily as stereotypical or restricted as it may initially seem to an analytical academic audience. Despite the spectacular cover stories, several items are intended to fulfil an educative and/or political purpose and, as in the case of *Tribute*, even the ostensibly banal image or observation may function at the micro political level of individual meaning production, or may operate in terms of complex ‘utopian’ collective psychological processes. If a researcher’s predilection to a large extent determines how content is theorised, it becomes difficult to argue that *Drum* will be less attractive than *Tribute* to the modern, educated black experience which is reaping the long-overdue benefits of apartheid’s demise, and which may have the advantages of a university education, overseas travel, and international corporate connections. And it does appear that *Drum* is valued by readers. This is what one reader of *Drum* declares on the letters page:

I salute our magazine writers, journalists and photographers because through them I am building a library. Instead of buying cigarettes, I get a copy of *Drum* or *True Love* or *Pace*....My learned friends can afford to buy sets of encyclopedias. But to me these magazines are equivalents....They are for my children and their children. This is their library. (June 1993:10)

Such a letter might dissuade us from automatically labelling *Drum* and similar magazines ‘downmarket’. It points to a straining after an upward social mobility which is perceived to depend not only on what is so often derided as ‘superficial’ consumption, but on the consumption of worthwhile knowledge. Further, the knowledge is itself also envisaged to be mobile, able to be transported across the generations. The sense of hope and futurity embedded in the claim “for my children and their children” cannot easily be sneered at.

In several respects, contemporary *Tribute* has a lineage that goes back to the original *Drum*: consider the address to an ‘emergent black modernity’ through the discourses of style, design, good looks, sport and leisure, for instance, alongside more overtly political interpellation through voter quizzes, staged political debates and investigative features. In some respects, the modern urban black presence affirmed in *Tribute* is even consciously imagined with reference to *Drum* of the 1950s and 1960s, and this particular instance of the past of black South African print journalism – where the past figures as ‘heyday’, as ‘willingness to overcome adversity through struggle’, as ‘creative resilience’ – is used as a nostalgic energiser of the present. Es’kia Mphahlele observes in his column “From my Notebook” (this particular column commemorating ten years of *Tribute* magazine): *Tribute* has focussed “from time to time on the Fifties people, those showbiz figures, *Drum* journalists and fiction writers who were making cultural history and whose resonances are still with us” (February 1997:160). Such cosmopolitan ‘Sophiatown’ identities seem to offer an inspirational ideal to many; to function as a form of popularised

'origin', if you will, for the urbanised African of the present. (Laden argues that *Drum* is an influential sociohistorical model for many of the magazines targeted at a black South African readership [no date a]). In the case of *Tribute*, the idea seems to be that precisely the urban sophistication demonstrated by many of what have popularly become known as "the Fifties people" is the precursor of a *Tribute* readership's contemporary lifestyle. Regulars in *Tribute* are irreverent columns such as "On the Other Hand" and "The Write Stuff", devised by *Drum*-style personality journalists; while Jon Qwelane, until recently filling his second stint as *Tribute* editor, fashioned for himself a journalistic style and, some would argue, even a high-living which had its analogue in the sensational, racy idiom that for many became the journalistic signature of *Drum*. Even Mphahlele, who writes the *Tribute* column "From My Notebook", was for a short while 'a *Drum* man', working for the title in its famed decade in "the posts of political reporter, sub-editor and fiction editor" (Thuynsma 1992:223). In some ways, *Drum* paved the way for political progress and provided black South Africans with a new cultural repertoire even if it did not invent a completely new form of black cultural experience: Couzens's biography of the writer H.I.E. Dhlomo, for instance, describes the loosely middle class, often mission-educated, urban identities of the 'New African' earlier this century (1985). Yet it is difficult to deny that the obliquely political, 'cosmopolitan' black South African lifestyles which constituted an important aspect of early *Drum* have through re-casting and re-mediation acquired dramatic public visibility and potent cultural signification. The visual and verbal signs contained in the magazine's pages and subsequently reproduced many times in coffee-table books, archival reprints, critical volumes, films and newspaper accounts, have given an unprecedented prominence and visibility to the 1950s as an apparent 'source' of black South African subjectivities marked by syncretism, sophistication and aspirational consumption. If we are to attribute value to *Tribute*, then, this cannot occur separately from an understanding of the cultural repertoires of the 'original' *Drum*.

Locating 'the literary' in Relation to *Tribute*

It is also important, here, in discussing the complexities of attributing meaning to *Tribute*, to point to the literary aspects of the magazine. This is a curious case to make. As my comments on the literary orientation of Chapman's research on *Drum* have made clear, the legitimacy of *Tribute* as a document of consumer culture should not depend on the magazine's being subsumed into an English Studies practice which, even if not narrowly conventional, is still preoccupied with generic distinctions and with forms of linguistic-stylistic creativity. Paradoxically, however, it has become clearer to me in the course of my research that my own attraction to *Tribute* must be phrased through discourses not completely distinct from those used by Chapman in recovering *Drum*. For 'the literary' in *Tribute* cannot be ignored, since it is precisely this discourse, broadly articulated in often sophisticated English, which is an intentional aspect of the magazine's brand identity, and hence of its appeal. It might even be said that it is the recognisably literary discourses of poetry and the short story which exert a particular attraction for the researcher whose institutional affiliation is 'English Studies'. In seeking to explain the appeal of the title to the English Studies professional we cannot ignore, either, that it is primarily through a sophisticated register of English, rather than 'township slang' or a vernacular, that the publishing and editorial teams of *Tribute* have habitually imagined themselves to be best able to address, and realise, their desired readership. The figure of the modern, professional, sophisticated black person has been formulated in *Tribute* not only through consumption and the visual consumption of images, but also through linguistic registers assumed to connote learning, and it is this 'modern' ambience which has attracted me as an educated white reader.

In trying to position *Tribute's* distinctive value when viewed against other magazines intended for a black South African audience, the producers of *Tribute* may be said to have invoked what is widely understood to be a 'literary culture'. This conception of 'the literary' must be recognised as more than the magazine's endorsing of a 'culture of reading', which is a characteristic of a magazine like *Bona*, published in English, Sotho and Zulu. *Bona's* readership is not flagged as 'learned', although the magazine mobilises the acquisition of 'reading skills' as an avenue of black improvement and advancement, and even as a critical bulwark against the perils of consumer modernity.²¹ *Tribute's* emphasis is not so much on language literacy, but on a modern cultural literacy in which literature is assumed to play an important role. The literary is manifest in *Tribute* in various ways. As we shall see, however, these are often contradictory: thus if they attribute significance to literature as a form of cultural capital, they also in effect remind us of the constructedness of the literary as a concept.

In *Tribute*, there is always a substantial book review section, for instance, written in registers which take for granted readers' familiarity with some of the signifiers and signifiatory practices of 'the literary': plot, character, point of view, poetic language, critical analysis – indeed, the very conventions not only of creative writing, but of professional reviewing. As early as April 1989, *Tribute* was granting up to three pages of dense copy to book reviews which covered titles as different as *The Guide to Mauritius*, Richard Rive's once-banned novel *Emergency*, *The A-Z of South African Politics*, and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, a book said to "consolidate her position as one of the best novelists America has to offer" (April 1989:117). While reviews have perhaps become commonplace in the consumer magazine as a genre, they tend not to have characterised those titles addressed to a black South African audience. The implication is that *Tribute* uses a culture of professional and leisured reading as one of the defining features of its own readership. (In July 1994, *Tribute's* then Literary Editor, Heather Robertson, endorsed for readers Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Paradise*, a novel only in 1997 happened on by the English department to which I am affiliated as ideal material for an English 2 postcolonial syllabus.)

In charting *Tribute's* literary qualities, we should also not underestimate Es'kia Mphahlele's "From My Notebook". Since the launch of the magazine in 1987, this column has appeared regularly every month, allowing readers a significant opportunity to establish through Mphahlele the kind of 'serious bond' that magazine publishers would ideally like to develop between audience and text. In particular, this column has coaxed readers into a thoughtful relationship with issues such as creative writing, education and public responsibility, all of which are characteristic of the 'public sphere' and urge to a 'civil society' associated with *Tribute* more broadly.

Es'kia (initially 'Ezekiel') Mphahlele, is a renowned South African creative and critical writer, as well as teacher. He has been professor of English at the Universities of Denver and Pennsylvania, and Professor of Comparative and African Literature at the University of the Witwatersrand (Adey *et al* 1986:141). Mphahlele's biography is even more dramatically configured by Peter Thuynsma who claims that his "is the story of a goat-herd, office clerk, teacher, acclaimed academic and award-winning writer" (1992:221). These comments, not insignificantly, represent Mphahlele's own life-story as one of upward social mobility in which the cultures of English literature and learning are crucial. If he is a stalwart in *Tribute*, he is also more directly a contributor to the debates shaping a South African literary-curriculum: his most recent academic paper, for instance, is "Living Writers, Living Culture", delivered at the February 1997 conference "Literary Studies at the Crossroads" at the University of South Africa, and published in the academic journal *Scrutiny* 2 (1997). Mphahlele featured on the cover of *Tribute* in May 1990, and this issue also contains a lengthy, extremely detailed interview with Mphahlele

by Sol Makgabutlane. (Such interviews imply, of course, that for South African literary studies *Tribute* is potentially a valuable critical resource.)

Mphahlele is repeatedly billed by *Tribute* magazine according to his impeccable literary pedigree, as in the example which follows

Undoubtedly the title of 'Father of Good Writing' belongs to none other than Es'kia 'Prof' Mphahlele, our regular columnist who tackles any and every subject. Erudite, well-travelled, experienced educationalist, and most down-to-earth, Prof always has the *last word* in the magazine. Read the master of the English language at his best. (March 1993:3)

The markers of authority in this quotation are drawn from both that set of conventions which invites the epithet 'elite' (cosmopolitanism, learning, English 'mastery'...), and from a more unexceptional 'ordinary' (in touch with 'common' people, and indeed, as the colloquial recasting of the academic title 'Professor' suggests, having an informal, open connection with 'the people'). These are forms of cultural knowledge that might more regularly be considered contradictory than correlative. Education, similarly, is simultaneously invoked in the service of advanced learning and Culture, and as encouragement to a grass-roots application and success. "You're No Fool, So Read!", Mphahlele urges (January 1994:96), ending his piece by advocating a critical cultural literacy which extends beyond that of basic literacy: "Your powers of thinking begin to distinguish good television and radio programmes from a lot of the canned dog food that passes for quality culture" (January 1994:96).

Maud Motanyane recollects that it was with some trepidation that she called on Mphahlele in the late 1980s in order to ask him to contribute to the new magazine. How would this literary scion respond to the proposed black lifestyle title, given not only the hostile, politicised climate of the day, but Mphahlele's own withering contempt for mass culture? As she explains: "I remember going to see Professor Es'kia Mphahlele. We needed him to endorse the publication by writing for us. I went into a long explanation about what the publication was trying to do. He stopped me in the middle and told me that he accepted our request" (cited in Mosotho 1997:40). Whatever his differences with the culture of consumerism, then, Mphahlele seemed able to discern value in a consumer magazine aimed at the promoting of an educated professional ethic amongst black South Africans.

Mphahlele has in effect turned his regular monthly column into a forum in which, as in his other creative-critical writing, he examines himself and his own immediate reality as a microcosm of contemporary South African experiences. His topics have been wide-ranging – columns have dealt with a janus-faced American democracy, with South African educationists' continued reverence for inappropriately conceived standards known as 'Mr Matric', and with continuing racism in democratically re-named South African towns – yet the repeated encouragement of aspiring writers, and the characteristic attempt to offer dignified yet astute appraisals of contentious sociocultural and sociopolitical issues, make for a concluding page dramatically different in tone and content from the conventional endpiece of the general interest consumer magazine. According to Jane Raphaely, publisher – and until recently editor – of the women's magazines *Cosmopolitan* and *Femina* – an endpiece should leave the reader laughing. Mphahlele is far from humourless: few readers can fail to miss his dry cynicism concerning the restrictions placed on human experience by apartheid, or his pleasure in the vigorously creative rhetoric and practices of much black township life, or the inventiveness through which he guides readers in the making of short stories from the fragments of ordinary experience. But his mode of address is most often characterised by an urge to moderation and (self) discipline, which intersects not only with English Studies' traditional attempt to discipline its student body into the pursuit of moral and intellectual thoughtfulness, but with *Tribute*'s own efforts to encourage in readers the

pursuit of oxymoronic traits such as leadership and democracy, empathy and discrimination. Whatever the scepticism meted out to English Studies and the Humanities generally within contemporary South African tertiary education policy, then, some of the ideals informing Literature and the literary continue to be remobilised in the texts of consumer culture as possible means through which a self-reflexively 'human' South African society might be realised.

In *Tribute*, literature has in fact been even more explicitly flagged than in Mphahlele's column. Every edition of the magazine, for instance, boasts a regular section which features short stories and poetry by local talent. With only a few exceptions in the magazine's ten-year history, the contents page has carried an overtly designated LITERATURE slot which is subdivided under the headings SHORT STORY and POETRY. These categories seem to be forms of cultural engagement which are especially valuable to readers: "I find your poetry section one of the most inspiring, eye-opening experiences in your magazine. Please continue to voice the experience of our people" (Sello wa Loate, New York. *Tribute* November 1994:13). Or, even if we allow that this letter was written in response to the suggested topic "How *Tribute* changed my life" (intended as part of *Tribute*'s celebratory decade issue), and probably selected for publication on account of its 'cosmopolitan' valorisation of the magazine, it is interesting to see that several local correspondents single out the literature component as a mark of their cultural investment in the text. (In a practice which is not unrelated, we could consider that the magazine's editor chooses to highlight this aspect of the magazine in selecting these particular letters for publication, and indeed that the magazine has through convention educated readers to discriminate themselves from an uncritical mass of people by learning to value a culture of the literary). Karen Mhlongo of Mobeni has this to say

by reading *Tribute*, I came to understand and appreciate good writing, and it encouraged me to write. The poetry and short story features each month are inspiring. So often they are humorous and sensitive – elements that one often finds lacking in writing these days. (April 1997:10)

Tebeho Nzeku writes

Tribute has had a profound impact on my life. It is classy, encourages a positive outlook on life and, unlike many run-of-the-mill black magazines that are filled with sensational stories, its pages are filled with top quality journalism. In addition, it has often made me laugh – Vusi Twala's articles were a favourite of mine.

I welcomed Jon Qwelane's editorial comment and no-holds-barred articles on Solomon 'Stix' Morewa and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. They were hard-hitting and informative, and reminded me of the gutsy exposure of troubles at the NSB a few years back, and the demise of Eugene Nyati.

In addition to the quality journalism, I have always enjoyed your poetry section. It is an excellent example of how literature is not only an intellectually stimulating experience, but an emotional and spiritual outlet as well. *Tribute* has made me realise that being black should not be equated with squalor and deprivation, but rather an incentive to reach the pinnacle of whatever discipline one is involved in. (April 1997:10-11)

I give this letter in full precisely because it both singles out the literary as especially significant in the development of the individual, even as literariness is also situated in relation to other meaningful discourses of the magazine. I return to this shortly.

In the 1990s, *Tribute* has also granted particular prominence to literary genres through the convention of competition. The March 1995 issue, for instance, announces a short story competition: "Here's your chance to be published – and win the R5000 top prize – in *Tribute*'s Short Story Competition, which is being presented in conjunction with Sanlam, NNTV and our sister magazines *Living* and *De Kat*" (March 1995:123).²² In conjunction with the influential South African life assurance company Sanlam, *Tribute* has also since 1994 sponsored a group of annual poetry prizes for writers whose work has not yet appeared in print. (Well-known and much-published South African poet Sipho Sepamla, though, seems to have slipped through the

net, recently being awarded a second prize.) Each month, one poet wins R250, and is short-listed for an annual prize of R1500.²³ This form of attention and page allocation is undeniably significant. If the 'investment' is partly a capitalist-commercial signifier, a form of corporate advertising both for *Tribute* and for Sanlam, it is also a peculiarly literary-cultural attention, and promotes a form of human cultural capital which is habitually de-valued in South African life. *Tribute's* endorsement of the literary (and its wish to use the literary to endorse itself) is unusual in a country where even nationally-acclaimed poets struggle to find a willing publisher, and where most consumer magazines have tended to forgo the granting of space to creative writing either by readers or by established literary figures. In fact, I would go so far as to draw curious analogies between the function of the literary in *Tribute* and the self-styled 'oppositional' and democratic cultural discourses of a magazine such as *Staffrider*. On the surface, *Tribute* is an upmarket black lifestyle magazine disparate from the *Staffrider* 'skelm of sorts' which from the late 1970s sought to provide a platform for black voices which had been silenced or ignored by mainstream South African culture (whether this was designated apartheid or the culture of academe). Yet both texts recognise the role which creative expression may play in the negotiating of sociocultural identity.²⁴

Let me spend a little time on the use of poetic discourses in *Tribute*. Poetry is often advertised in the contents pages with a figurative flourish: "There is simply no stopping the flow of creative adrenalin coursing through our budding poets, and here we publish a selection of their offerings" (April 1993:3). Notice that the metaphoric embellishment of the first clause is 'balanced' by the polite reasonableness of the second. The registers work together to connote a teacherly authority that is eminently equipped to recognise literary merit, and to foster a nascent literary creativity. In March 1993, moreover, the poetry section of the magazine is introduced in the contents column through the caption "Our budding Shelleys and Byrons show their mettle" (March 1993:3) while in August 1993 we have the declaration "Move over Wordsworth, Gray, Coleridge, Yeats – here come the *Tribute* poets!" (August 1993:3). This form of self-advertisement – it assumes a readership versed in advanced English as well as familiar with, and even eager to be addressed through, the discourses of canonical English Literature – could prove problematic for the cultural critic who wishes to theorise the magazine as 'progressive'. It is an awkward reminder of the tendency within both the popular press and democratic government to valorise as an aspirational cultural model the so-called high cultural artefact and genius of romantic creativity, while at the same time calling for the Africanisation and indigenisation of South African cultural practices and principles. Yet these quotations from a thoroughly commodified source such as *Tribute* remind us that those disciplines which constitute the traditional Humanities are not necessarily *undermined* by the destructive logics of 'the market'; rather, they surface sporadically and metonymically to function as a form of cultural capital that continues to shape the imagined identity of many black South Africans who occupy prominent, leadership positions in politics, the arts, the public service and the corporate world. (Mandela has frequently announced his love of 'good books'; ANC leader Chris Hani was reputed to revere Shakespeare, Deputy President Thabo Mbeki quotes from Langston Hughes in order to emphasise a point about political volatility.) It is not the case that Literature has simply been demoted by a society given to more pragmatic pursuits; but that Literature has come to be recognised as only one rhetorical tactic among many.

The literary discourses in *Tribute* obviously require attention, since they seem intended to function, at least in part, as a device which authenticates and authorises the magazine's superior, intellectual quality, and its appropriateness for an educated, informed audience. Readers are encouraged to perceive of themselves as being able to demonstrate, and even manipulate, what

are widely understood to be culturally privileged rhetorical codes. To put this in rather more jargon-inflected language: the literary in *Tribute* functions as a system of exchange that “is both regulated by and serves to regulate class positioning as an enunciative moment that is manifested as the ability to ‘speak’ with authority” (Radner 1995:7). (Laden recognises as much, explaining that of all the magazines addressed to a black South African audience, it is *Tribute* which most visibly assumes fluency not only in English, but in the formal knowledges derived from secondary and tertiary education [no date a].) In the editorial environments of consumer periodicals – whether addressed to a white or a black audience – *Tribute*’s willingness to grant *regular* and *substantial* space to a range of recognisably literary imaginative expression constitutes a distinctive self-signature.

Nevertheless, many of comments in the preceding discussion also work to suggest that L/literature in *Tribute* is not a secure but a volatile category that is repeatedly re- and de-constructed. What we need to understand, I think, is that an analysis of literary discourse as used in *Tribute* can show ‘the literary’ to be highly unstable, rather than unproblematically affirmed. Some repetition for the sake of clarity is in order here. Return to the apparently simple quotation “Our budding Shelleys and Byrons show their mettle”. The reference to an esteemed cultural repertoire – to a historically legitimated body of literature – momentarily displaces the discursive status of the magazine from mass culture to high culture. Readers are assumed to possess the cultural capital necessary to make sense of the reference. Even if this is not actualised, they are prompted to aspire towards a desirable cultural norm. The reference functions as a subtle criticism of those who would prefer to consider High Culture – European culture – beyond the conceptual reach of black South African intelligence. At this point, it is by invoking ‘the classics’ that *Tribute* sets itself apart from the ‘mass’ of black South African magazines and presents itself as a quality commodity which encourages its readers to imagine themselves as similarly possessed of cultural distinction. Radner’s term here is “generic kinship” (1995:10).²⁵ The reference to a canonised body of English Romantic poetry also works in a valorising capacity to suggest that those poets who submit their work to the *Tribute* poetry pages are ‘heroically’ able to be measured against the best: against a romantic ‘school’ or ‘movement’ which within education is still often considered the measure of poetic excellence, and against individual poets whose works are often associated with dramatic explorations of inner subjectivity and universally-enduring truths.

But the sentence “Our budding Shelleys and Byrons show their mettle” is simultaneously characterised by other impulses. If dichotomies between worthwhile and questionable culture are called into (implicit) operation, the implication that excellent, established models of poetic achievement are within reach of emulation by a *Tribute* readership effects a subtle shift in cultural hegemony. When read in relation to the plethora of contradictory discourses characteristic of *Tribute* as a text of consumer culture the literary is denied any *essentially* privileged space: high sits alongside low; the popular is mobilised as educationally consequential; readers are encouraged to immerse themselves in the human and cultural mass...and to aspire to excellence. Thus, taking merely a single issue (July 1993) as an example, I suggest that the literary is as often refracted as it is precisely focussed. It is featured in the contents pages of the magazine as but one form of culture in a cultural repertoire which is regularly constituted through categories such as Motoring, Fashion, Trends, Restaurants and Society (and the unlisted and unacknowledged authorships of those image banks constituted by advertising), as well as through a variety of more recognisably ‘artistic’ cultural features which cover topics such as graffiti (“Prophets of the Wall”); the politics of a new government policy which seems to privilege aspirant arts bureaucrats over the needs of artists (“The Crude Politics of Art”); the pen and koki drawings of self-taught artist Tito Zungu (“Accidental Artist”), and the South African Theatre of the Deaf (“Where

Actions Speak Louder than Words"). The literary element is necessarily to be understood only in relation to this larger contemporary cultural set of consumer society where culture is sometimes recognisable 'as such', but is also more diffusely experienced as leisure and lifestyle.

It is never clear from the text, either, precisely how the readers will position themselves....Which aspects of culture are they consuming? And can they (need they) effect a seamless passage from one cultural discourse to another if they are to 'make sense' of the magazine? Probably not. 'The magazine' is a genre which unevenly collates and energises diverse discourses, irregularly harnessing them in the service of epithets such as the 'literary', the 'popular', the 'elite' and so on. Thus *Tribute* functions as a fluid cultural matrix in which readers profit from the productive consumption of varied meanings, rather than being dictated to by an insistent authority which might take the form of English Culture or Western Modernity or even Traditional Black Identity. As Radner expresses it, cultural knowledge

as cultural capital...does not function in terms of a unitary hierarchy, but in terms of a complex grid of interlocking discursivities that the subject negotiates strategically. Further, the subject is never locked into a specific hierarchy but moves...between discourses and their defining hierarchies. (1995:7)

Given the ability of the magazine genre to accommodate within its design various 'literary sub-genres' – the short story, the essay, the character column – a magazine such as *Tribute* could actually encourage us to understand 'the literary' through 'clines' or tendencies, rather than inherent features. Formal literary categories are selected from a field of language strategies that are generated by, and function within, a larger sociopolitical and sociopsychological 'discourse set'. It is no accident that the management of *Tribute* uses the literary. The repeated inclusion in *Tribute* of forms such as fiction and poetry, book reviews and Mphahlele's column 'confirm' and 'reaffirm' the category 'literature' as a cluster of desirable codes connoting the cultured and the civilised, countering the derogatory equation of 'blackness' with barbaric physicality in the racist languages of apartheid. A study of *Tribute*, then, suggests that any conception of the literary is tied to social needs and preferences.

What should be evident is that this is as true of my own interest in the magazine. At least to some degree, my own educated, middle class preferences and ideals are catered for in *Tribute*, allowing me to recognise myself as 'hailed' or addressed by the magazine. *Tribute* presents an extremely literate, worldly image; one that apparently has more to do with my experience and needs as an intellectual white person in a changing South Africa than have magazines like *Pace* and *Bona*. For rather paradoxically, it is *Tribute*'s success in marketing the visual images and reasonable, educated ideas of a professional black middle class which establishes an imaginary suspension of 'race', encouraging felt connections with a projected non-racial, modern society. This may help to explain the appeal of the magazine to white academics such as me, anxious for a place in a new South Africa we wish for our own comfort to conceive of as a fundamentally 'non-racial' heterotopia, rather than as an exclusively 'black' majoritarian social ideal which for us could be but anti-utopian.

What has emerged in my reading of *Tribute* is that to engage with the texts of a popular or mass culture (however we decide to designate it) is to be reminded that the theories and practices of academe never coincide precisely with the vagaries – the shifting powers and pleasures – that constitute 'the world'. If we literary academics often discover in the supposedly superficial text of the masses only the comforting confirmations of the banal 'them' and the subtle 'us', the humbling reciprocal would be to recognise that 'the world' habitually complicates the truisms of our discipline about who has the power to create meaning. To engage with *Tribute* is to enter the struggle to control the rules of signification. As I see it, a research reading of *Tribute* in the academic context could raise issues pertaining to the widely perceived need, in the nearly new

New South Africa, for different, complex icons of 'black', 'white' and 'human' experience, and to the vested interests of academe in the construction and analysis of contemporary cultural forms.

I am not so naive as to claim for *Tribute* the authority of 'authenticity' in relation to something called 'black experience', yet this monthly magazine does seem, through images, editorials, articles, letters and other copy, valuably to map both a number of the shortcomings and strengths, similarities and differences, in 'black' and 'white' people's experiences and worldviews, while sustaining a dynamic between sympathetic racial solidarity and critical distance which does not invalidate the vision of a collective *human* ideal. Although the magazine may have an initial impact predicated upon black people's claim to a glossy, ostensibly undifferentiated 'modernity', *Tribute* cannot but re-present 'black experience' and indeed 'modernity' unevenly: a recurrent emphasis on black achievement co-exists with an eclectic hoarding of ideas, images, perspectives, items and identities that might somehow signify the potentially infinite repertoire of both 'black life' and an idealised 'non-racial life' within the un/bounded South African imaginary.

Having worked to theorise *Tribute*, it becomes evidently condescending to equate consumer culture with either repressed voices in need of liberation or false consciousness being inscribed into dopey readers. As James Donald argues in *Sentimental Education*, researchers of contemporary culture might more valuably be interested in the "categories, values and narratives...disseminated through the activity of reading", and the ways in which "these reappear in the folded or crumpled form of fantasy, desire and anxiety" (1992:57-8).

Notes to Chapter 1

1. Beyond the specific instance of *Tribute* as a title, the 'genre' of the magazine could be an important text in the context of university English Studies. Given that Departments of English continue to engage primarily with printed material (however much poststructuralist theory may have extended the parameters of the text), it seems unreasonable to ignore a form like the consumer magazine. Following Benedict Anderson's comments on the newspaper, perhaps, we might want to regard 'the magazine' as epitomising the concept of bestseller in a society of ephemerality and obsolescence (1990:78). Whatever the appeal of television and of cyberspace, some media professionals remark that the value of a magazine lies in its being "a friendly, tactile and portable medium" (Leonsins, cited in Eksteen 1996b:19). And while several specialists may offer this congruence of characteristics as an argument intended to persuade *advertisers* of magazines' excellence as advertising media, many magazine readers would probably value magazines for similar reasons: the statement cannot be theorised solely in the service of Capital. Interestingly, while 'serious', 'proper' news, in both its audiovisual and printed incarnations, has in some tertiary institutions become a legitimate focus of English Studies attention, magazines remain under-researched and even scorned as an index of a frivolous, indiscriminating 'taste'. It is significant, I think, that the volatilised categories of mass and popular culture feature prominently in those South African English Studies syllabi which were singled out for especial praise in Dovey's (1992) survey of South African universities.

2. During the early 1990s, Enosi went into the red for reasons that are not known to me. (Mosotho implies that the magazine had experienced a decline in both advertisers' and readers' confidence under the editorship of Nokwande Sithole [1997:40].) Between August and October 1992, *Tribute* changed ownership from Enosi to Penta, acquired new management and, in October 1992, a new editor in the form of Jon Qwelane. What follows, Mosotho claims, is that the "magazine's circulation doubled in record time. Advertisers who had abandoned the publication returned" (1997:40).

In the recent past, the magazine has once again faced material difficulties which Nicholas Leonsins, Penta's deputy managing director, attributes to poor financial management. In mid 1996, Penta Publications went into provisional liquidation, and in lieu of unpaid printing costs in the region of R3,3 million (Golding-Duffy 1996b:8) had to cede to Perskor the magazine *De Kat*, one of its most successful titles. The company had made itself victim to what is known as high gearing – a business euphemism for too much debt. Although *Living* (repositioned in 1996 as *Living Africa*), *De Kat* and *Tribute* had generated sufficient income to sustain themselves, this was inadequate to cover the fixed costs of the additional (award-winning) niche titles – *MegaLife*, *Big Screen*, *Keeping Track* – which Penta had launched. Leonsins argues that growth occurred far too quickly, and that "focus was on editorial excellence all the time and not so much the financial aspects or making money. We almost got fooled into a false sense of security that, with editorial excellence, everything else would come automatically" (Cited in Eksteen 1996b:18). The Penta stable and name has been bought through a joint investment by Times Media Limited and Independent Newspapers, a co-operation which has enabled the latter to enter the growth area of the South African magazine market. Despite its obviously weak negotiating position, Penta refused to sell *individual* magazine titles to interested buyers, insisting, instead, on marketing a 'Penta' concept and associated brand identities that would less easily be assimilated into another group. Penta has sought to preserve its character as publisher of specialist consumer magazines with an upmarket orientation.

According to Aymés, general manager of TML's (Times Media Limited) magazine division "*Tribute* was the most interesting of all the titles when Penta was for sale" (Cited

in Eksteen 1996b:5). Four bidders, among them Perskor, TML/ Independent Newspapers and Primedia Publishing, had been interested in acquiring the title on account of the magazine's "good track record, brand credibility, circulation and advertising revenue" (Golding-Duffy 1996b:8). A significant component of *Tribute's* appeal was its niche identity: an audience of upwardly mobile black professionals.

With the resignation of Jon Qwelane to become director of Mafube Publishing, *Tribute's* editor from November 1997 is Vusi Mona. He is billed in the media as a "Bright young" thing aged 31 who "studied at the University of the North and obtained a Bachelor of Arts and a postgraduate Bachelor of Education degree with a distinction in research methodology". He "began his career as a teacher and lectured at two colleges of education in Mpumalanga... joined the *Mail & Guardian* two years ago" as editor of this newspaper's monthly publication *Teacher*, and his "educational achievements include time spent on a Press Fellowship at Cambridge" (Bechoo 1997:4). The magazine's ethos of professionalisation, education and upward mobility are likely to be well-embodied here.

3. I am not certain, however, how to bring critical assumptions about gendered genre to bear upon another supplement to the magazine, *The Ultimate Tribute Man*. Does this 'added-value' discourse, already familiar to South Africans through *Cosmopolitan's CosmoMan* enclosure, prove that *Tribute* is fundamentally a women's text? Or need we also take into account that in addressing men in the register of lifestyle the compilers of such a supplement have recognised the comparative shortage of male titles on the South African magazine market? (It is only in October 1997, for instance, that publishers have launched a visibly black male magazine, *SportsLife*. See also note 4 to Chapter 2.) I remain unable to categorise *The Ultimate Tribute Man* supplement with precision. Yet I am sufficiently persuaded by the contents and tone of *Tribute* over ten years that this is primarily a black professional lifestyle title: it is not gender but the discursive fields of race and class which are habitually foregrounded in the magazine.
4. On the cover, Moephuli wears a knotted, richly printed turban. I am curious about the degrees of overlap between this image and the equivocally-iconographic Winnie Mandela, among whose fashion signatures was wildly inventive 'African' headgear. The turban worn by Moephuli was also more broadly symbolic since it was beginning, for many black South Africans, along with garments like the dashiki and the boubou, to connote an explicitly 'Pan African' component of a more 'western', cosmopolitan black middle class style designated through such status labels as Gucci, Hugo Boss or Dior.
5. Another habitually occluded moment of marginality and fragility in the discourses of class would be the very expression "white collar" or "blue collar", neither of which are able to characterise the world of paid work in terms of female codes.
6. Even Tomaselli and Tomaselli acknowledge, for instance, that there are degrees of ideological ambivalence to be attributed to the so-called black South African press, and to the relationship between the black middle classes and the commercial mass media. Yet they repeatedly attempt to recuperate this 'ambivalence' in the service of a compliance that precludes real dissent and the development of what they seem to idealise as a truly oppositional critical discourse (1987).
7. Local black businessman Richard Maponya is about to develop Soweto's biggest, majority-black-owned, regional shopping complex. He had been trying without success to initiate the project for eighteen years, but claims that banks would not finance him (Leshilo 1997:3).

8. A recent article in the *Mail & Guardian's Friday* cultural supplement, for instance, focuses on "The New Photography: How We See Ourselves", and features slide images by Santu Mofokeng of archival photographs of 'middle class' black South Africans. As Charles Blignaut explains in a review, in "The Black Photo Album: Look At Me 1890-1950" Mofokeng has

dug into the state archives in order to pose several questions about black South African identity....The subjects of Mofokeng's archive are depicted as hankering for a certain European ideal: the fur carpets, elaborate pillar backdrops, suits and finery. Yet at the same time, they seem somehow detached, as if asking their own questions about how we see them being seen. 'Who is gazing?' asks Mofokeng. 'What was the occasion? Do these images serve to challenge prevailing Western perceptions of the African? Are these images evidence of mental colonisation? Mofokeng is offering us a framework in which to make our own conclusions. (1997:3)

These photographs, and many others like them, appeared in the November 1994 issue of *Tribute* in an article entitled "Picture Focus: Glimpses of History". They are depictions of style, of fashionable codes of conduct...of people eager to represent themselves (to others and to themselves) as worthy subjects of the prolonged gaze of posterity. Not merely because of their sepia tints and the ivory-toned background purposely intended to set off their 'pastness', the images give a moving history to the colourful, stylish contemporaneity which comprises the bulk of *Tribute's* matter. The photo feature is billed in the contents page as "Ordinary people...glimpses of the history we nearly lost" (1994:1). "Traces are found in photographs of beautiful, fashionable people who have become nameless...a survey of existing public photographic archives in museums and libraries has revealed a saddening paucity of images of urban black family life" (1994:80). The author appeals to those who have such photographs to contact Santu Mofokeng at the Institute for Advanced Social Research at the University of the Witwatersrand. (Similarly urbane, 'middle-class' images of the founding members of the ANC have been used to recuperate for a present public the history of this party in a double-page print advertisement. See for instance the March 1994 edition of *Tribute*, pages 35-36.)

9. Interestingly: we are told in the *Mail & Guardian Inside* supplement in a biographical note to an article by Henry Louis Gates Jr., that Gates "made his name as a literary archaeologist, rescuing the forgotten work of nineteenth-century African Americans, work that he continues with his Black Periodical Fiction Project" (Gates 1997:17).
10. For work on *Drum*, see for instance Addison (1978), Chapman (1989), Dodson (1974), Driver (1996) Gready (1990), and Nixon (1994).
11. Michael Real maintains, for instance, that if two-dimensional black characters such as "Remus, Rastus, and Sambo have been largely replaced by Bill Cosby, Whitney Houston, and Michael Jordan in our 'recoded ethnicity'...the range of Black roles is still restricted primarily to comedy, music and sports" (1989:254).
12. Interestingly, while most of the covers are characterised by what is immediately recognisable as high-quality reproduction, on occasions an edition has been fronted by an image which is blurred, as in the out-of-focus head shot of Steve Bantu Biko on the September 1996 cover. (See Figure 1.iii.) We might be inclined to read this partly in terms of practical constraints, given that when *Tribute's* editor had previously wished to feature Biko on the cover, the poor quality of available pictures necessitated that an artist be commissioned to produce a drawing. In the case of the September 1996 cover of Biko, we would probably read the image through a knowledge that only poor quality photographs are available of this once-banned Black Consciousness leader. We would recognise, too, that

issues of image-density and focus would have been exacerbated by the need to enlarge the image to sufficient size for an A4 portrait shot. Yet the decision to use the image, despite its haziness, could be interpreted beyond the frame of mere necessity if the 'lack' of clarity is imagined to function as a de-familiarising device. The assumption here would be that *Tribute* readers are visually literate (the layout and graphics used in the magazine have over the years been distinguished by an increasing attention to design principles), and thus able to interpret the cover through discourses of both photographic style and the recovery of occluded (black) South African histories. How interesting to discover, then, in the editorial of the September edition, that "For our cover, we turned to technology, and commissioned an artist to age the BC leader's photograph from 31 years – his age when the picture was taken – to 49 years, which he would be today" (1996:5). Thus the image also works to *familiarise* readers in subtle ways with a supposedly spectacular figure of the black struggle. The image harnesses simulation in the service of a desire to render humanly authentic and credible, through the usually ordinary and inevitable process of ageing, a black leader whose loss in early youth is still widely mourned.

Tribute's covers are interesting in other respects. Firstly, the editors have made regular use of collective images, a fairly unusual strategy in a South African consumer magazine industry that is given to foreground beneath the masthead the famous (or at least visually appealing) *individual*. Among such cover images have been: a complex, even 'postmodern' synthesis depicting several glamorous stars/characters from the popular local television soap *Generations* (adjacent to 'images' on television screens); a black male and white female (both apparently naked) as if in intimate embrace; and then-editor Jon Qwelane face-to-face with then-President F.W. de Klerk. The 'collective' image seems intended to give wider human weight than is usually achieved through individual images to the 'South Africanness' that *Tribute* hopes to address. On occasions, it seems to work to articulate for *Tribute* an obvious degree of social relevance, by visually bringing together individuals from groups which had been structurally separated by apartheid. One of the magazine's most provocative covers is that of August 1993, banned and then unbanned, which places an image of a black woman breast-feeding a white child above the infamous slogan uttered by erstwhile ANC Youth League president Peter Mokaba, and asks "Does South Africa need this?". As that month's editorial and a special feature made clear, the photograph originated in a controversial series of images produced for a 1984 advertising campaign for the Italian-international clothing firm Benetton. (For a discussion of Benetton's advertising campaign, and a better understanding of the provocation upon which *Tribute* was playing, see Falk [1997].)

13. Refer to William Finnegan's *Dateline Soweto: Travels with Black South African Reporters* (1988) for a detailed account of Qwelane as a 'journalist personality'.
14. Mattelart (1980) is especially critical of what she considers to be an illusory 'democracy of consumption' central to the form of the consumer magazine.
15. The black South African cultural theorist, creative writer and educationist Njabulo S. Ndebele is President of the South African Congress of Writers; until July 1998 he was also Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of the North. He is an award-winning short story writer, and the author of *South African Literature and Culture* (1994), a notable volume of critical essays spanning the mid-1980s to early-1990s. On the cover of this collection, South African Nobel Laureate Nadine Gordimer suggests that Ndebele "is a provocative thinker in the reassessment of values...important to South Africa in this era of transition".

16. The critique of commodity culture contained in Ndebele's more explicitly literary-critical discourse has been all-but-ignored in the paper's meta-critical circulation within the South African literary establishment, although Morphet's 1992 piece does take up the matter. I'm inclined to interpret this wider omission as characteristic of the tendency amongst South African English Studies critics to treat consumer culture with little more considered a response than naturalised derision, or denial, which in itself embodies the facile sloganeering against which Ndebele is reacting.
17. The imputation of destructive expedience levelled against commodity culture had previously emerged in Ndebele's award-winning short fiction. "The Music of the Violin" (1983), for instance, portrays a dysfunctional black middle class. If the narrative does not dismiss cultural hybridity (Vukani loves playing European classics on the violin, in preference to familiarising himself with popular township guitar songs), Ndebele is nevertheless scathing in his treatment of the commodified lifestyle which leads the young boy's parents to forgo a humane sense of extended African family. In their apartheid-defined subject positions of Inspector of 'Bantu Education' and nursing sister, the husband and wife continually try to stave off an 'uncultured', lower class township culture, and instead debase themselves by reifying a middle class, 'white' culture embodied in such status-rich products and practices as a china tea set, multiracial women's meetings, society manners, ballet, violin playing, and expensive custom-made furniture. Despite a sophisticated narrative focalisation which allows the reader access to the young boy's fraught subjectivity, it is this kind of alienation, Ndebele seems to suggest, that awaits the black person who eschews his 'true' African identity. (Had the magazine been launched at that stage, would Ndebele have been tempted to depict a symbolically-damning copy of *Tribute* lying on one of the family's coffee-tables?)
18. I cannot pursue this here, but it will be worth exploring at a later date the ways in which the educative dimensions of such mission statements intersect with and refract (a) those earlier forms of colonial missionising through which Africans were schooled into enlightenment ideas of education and the consumption of a modern set of cultural practices and (b) what Burke in his study on consumption in Zimbabwe (1996) calls "the new mission", namely advertising and market research.
19. This argument is valid, I maintain, even were some critics to object that the comparatively privileged middle class orientation of the magazine is over-represented in a proliferation of images which by implication marginalise 'other' forms of contemporary black South African life. The criticism might maintain that although *Tribute* asserts the power of an idealised collective energy, its emphasis on exceptional 'black success' and its preponderance of 'lifestyle' images tend to push to the social periphery, as deviant, insignificant or, at best, as deserving of 'upliftment', social groups such as 'the poor', 'the working class', 'the unemployed'.
20. As I indicate in note 9 above, in a similar project Henry Louis Gates Jnr., and The Harvard University African Studies Centre are reputedly engaged in a mammoth study of the 'literary' dynamics which feature in such magazines as *Ebony*. Postmodernism's perforation of the boundaries between high and low culture notwithstanding, it seems that the texts of consumer culture find most sympathetic access into the educational institution when they closely mimic the generic-conceptual criteria through which High Culture continues to be staged. As the reader will see, my own preoccupation with *Tribute* is not exempt from such convoluted explanation. (The 1990 Longman educational volume *Past into Present* values "The Tatler" and "The Spectator", popular journals of the early eighteenth century as archives of material which marks "the beginnings of the novel as practised later by Fielding

and Richardson” [1990:358]. At the same time, though, the periodicals are regarded as being ‘in themselves’ “influential essays on the manners and social conduct of the time” [1990:357].)

21. Tomaselli and Tomaselli point out that *Bona* was established as an educational magazine “to counteract *Drum* and was distributed free to African schools” (1987:48).
22. The matter of sponsorship points to the increasing investment of big business in conventional high culture as a form of corporate advertising, while the identity of the judges for the 1995 competition suggests the interpenetration of so-called intellectual and popular life. The panel of five included academic and creative-critical writer Njabulo Ndebele, novelist and journalist Jenny Hobbs and Andries Oliphant, editor of South Africa’s ‘popular literary’ magazine *Staffrider*.
23. Literary editor of the magazine – and with Es’kia Mphahlele the judge of the poetry competition – was Heather Robertson, herself the recipient of the coveted Ingrid Jonker Poetry award, and a finalist in a national literary competition sponsored by Sanlam during the annual Grahamstown Festival of Arts. The reader of the prize-winning poems at the first Sanlam/*Tribute* Poetry Competition Awards in Johannesburg was well-known literary-cultural performer and writer, Gcina Mhlophe.
24. A feature on *Staffrider* written by Kaizer Nyatumba appears in *Tribute* in September 1989:110-111.
25. It has been useful, in seeking to explain the jumbled constellation of issues and ideas through which ‘the literary’ is manifest in *Tribute*, to borrow from Radner’s (1995) research into feminine culture and the pursuit of pleasure. She discusses, for example, the ways in which forms of consumer culture like the fashion magazine and the television serial circulate the pre-eminent female signifier of ‘appearance’ through apparently contradictory cultural languages like canonicity and narcissism. As she observes about television shows which represent themselves as ‘quality’ rather than ‘trash’: “the viewer is reassured that she is culturally superior to the masses and that, although she may be watching television, she is not wasting time” (1995:8).

CHAPTER TWO

Take Another Look: Reading and Re-reading Women's Magazines

This Chapter draws attention to some of the ways in which reality and experience are narrativised in examples of contemporary South African women's magazines, and to the role of the reader in producing and re-shaping what initially appears to be self-evident text. Following Helen Pleasance in her work on magazines for young British women, I use the idea of narrative fairly loosely to mean "patterns and conventions of making sense" (1991:70), and I relate this to the shifting formation of contemporary female experience. While my critical reading in several ways intersects with the analyses of generic magazine discourses already discussed in relation to *Tribute*, in the present Chapter it is my position as female reader – albeit white and middle class – that is foregrounded. Further, given the often pious dismissal of women's magazine texts by a range of critics which includes some of feminist persuasion, I also give particular attention to the complicated interanimations between text, audience and contexts of reception.

In my theorising of women's magazines, the notion of narrative is asked to perform both centripetal and centrifugal functions. In part, I argue that the magazines circulate a number of widely-held belief systems, conventions, and ideas about gender in relation to contemporary lifestyle, and that these are loosely organised – narrativised, if you will – through generic conventions such as feature articles, advertisements, contents pages, letters pages, advice columns and so on, as well as through the repeated foregrounding of thematic content. I suggest that through the repetition of material, categories, images and view points imagined to have a bearing on 'woman', the magazines invoke already-existing assumptions about 'the female' even as they help to create these assumptions. (The notion that there exists a 'female' discursive set in terms of which women's experience is collectively rather than irreducibly singularly constructed, is reminiscent of claims made by Ros Ballaster *et al* [1991].)¹ At the same time, however, I suggest that this apparently consensual, naturalised 'story' can be better understood as volatile and heterogeneous: both in terms of different voices, views, and images *in the text* (a dissension and contradiction which have been deliberately placed in the text during its compilation), and in terms of *readers* making their own meanings of the material, which could occur through an infinite, often contradictory collocation of responses amongst which might be agreement, irony, disbelief, mockery, unfulfilled desire, fantasy, anger, rejection. In other words, as Hilary Radner (1995) argues, any imagined Female narrative in the women's magazine genre is tenuous, and because it depends upon being actualised by a reader, it should not be thought empirically to exist. It is surely interesting, for instance, that a dictionary entry on the etymology of the term magazine connects an habituated sense of 'the magazine' to forms of actual and figurative storage, sometimes portable in nature, and that in contemporary usage the term is indicative of a genre meant both to inform and entertain. Similarly, it is perhaps pertinent that in discussing magazines aimed at women, critics make inconstant use of the singular and plural epithets 'woman' and 'women' as qualifiers for the term 'magazine' (see for instance Ballaster *et al* 1991:118). If we cannot doubt the grammatical correctness of 'women's magazines' as a collective term for several titles aimed at women, how are we to understand the shifting use of 'the woman's magazine' and 'the women's magazine'? Is it an unconscious, yet highly suggestive error which communicates the linguistic-ideological difficulties informing even those critical accounts which argue that the magazine genre for women homogenises female difference into the monologic Female narrative? In the case of the present Chapter I decided, not having the answer to such questions, deliberately to replicate this critical unevenness as a marker of the volatile material and methods with which I am working.

It is hardly surprising, then, that this Chapter does not pretend to offer an exhaustive critical examination (or even objective cross-examination) of the women's magazine genre, South African or otherwise. Nor does it proceed primarily by means of content analysis (the numerative appearance of the content – x negative images of women versus y liberating images) or of semiology (the messages which contents signify), even though I do refer to content and form in order to develop a speculative framework for the reading of several South African women's magazines. As should become clear, indeed, the 'texts' with which I engage are as much critical-intellectual commentaries on women's magazines, as women's magazine texts *per se*.

Cosmopolitan, Femina, Fair Lady, True Love: the Titles

The contemporary South African women's magazine titles to which my discussion is related are *Cosmopolitan* (published by Raphaely & Associates and National Magazines), *Femina* (Associated Magazines), *Fair Lady* (National Magazines), and *True Love* (National Magazines). (See Figures 3.i – 3.vi.) While my own preferences as leisure-time reader of women's magazines have influenced the choice of titles, I have also reached beyond personal idiosyncrasy by selecting women's magazines which are recognised by the trade to be leaders within the South African English-speaking market. In a Chapter given largely to emphasising the subjective elements of intellectual inquiry, this tactic allows me to simulate the 'objective', 'scientific' orientation that continues to exert its mystical authority over academic discourse.

Since I am curious about the representation in South African women's magazines of the unstable subjectivities of current femininity, I have used a particular inflection of 'the contemporary' in choosing magazine titles. I recognise that there is no *necessary* correlation between being a 'leading women's magazine' and being 'progressive' or 'up-to-date' (the contemporary is not necessarily premised on progress to the exclusion of traditional or conservative impulses, and indeed this Chapter argues that women's magazines comprise a dynamic of constancy and change). Yet I have sought to engage with the fact that despite slightly different constructions of age, income, interest and race, the magazines on which I place my emphasis are explicitly marketed as South African women's brands which address segments of an educated, socially- and culturally-mobile female readership which has comparative financial independence and modern cultural capital. All of the titles to which I refer place themselves in interesting relation to the category 'women's magazine' by both using and disabusing conventional conceptions of femininity. They are habitually marketed by their editors and publishers as innovative rather than traditional in terms of the current, even liberated discourses of femaleness in which they participate. They encourage women readers to perceive of themselves as modern and well-informed both through the discourses in the magazines themselves, and through familiarity with a range of other media such as film, books, music, newspapers, television and increasingly, the internet. Readers are urged to consider themselves as generally confident of and competent in the heterogeneous pleasures and responsibilities of contemporary womanhood: fashion, health, local and global news, beauty, social comment, domesticity, decor, entertaining, business and information technology.

Unlike many commentators on women's magazines, though, I am interested to investigate this modernity as being constantly negotiated through both the extending and containing of female forms and themes, in which process even supposed containment is not necessarily experienced as alienation from an imagined 'ideal' female subjectivity. For the historically white titles *Femina*, *Fair Lady* and *Cosmopolitan*, I also attempt to materialise a particularly powerful signifier of South African contemporaneity: multiracialism. Here, the meanings clustered around 'contemporaneity' are understood to mean not only 'nowness' and 'newness' but 'progressivity',

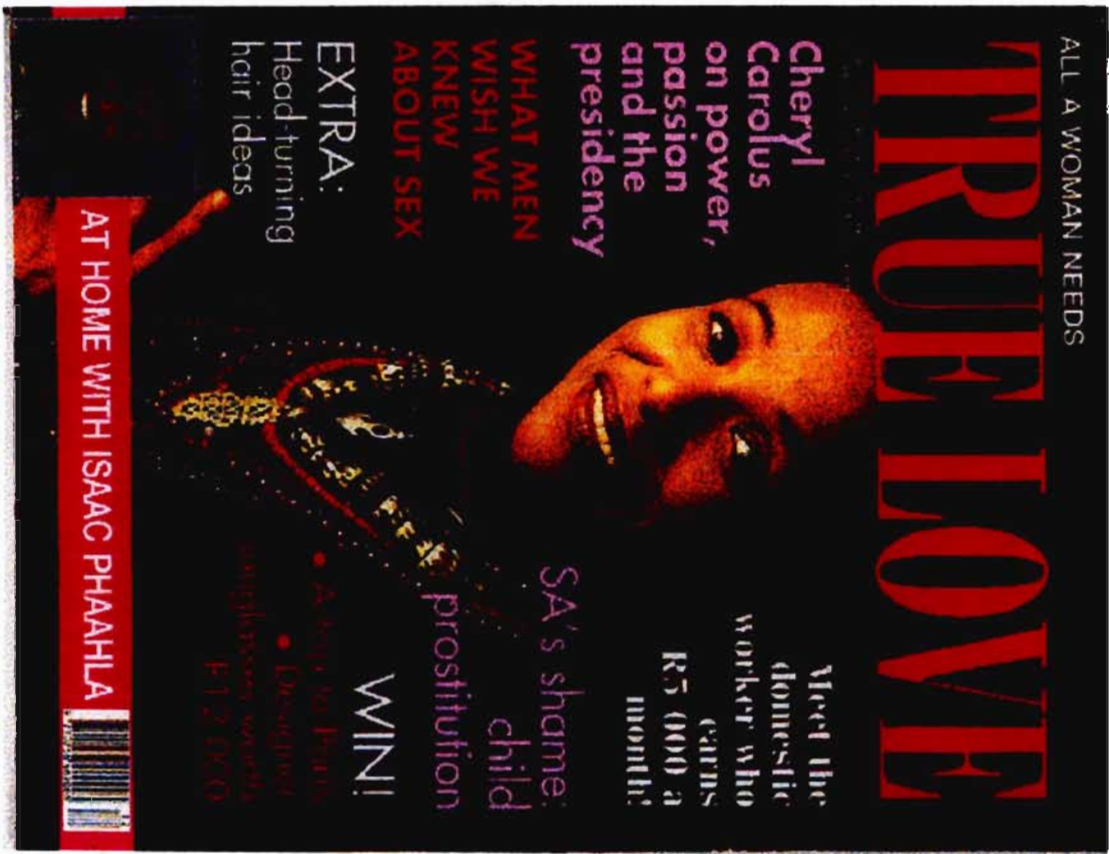
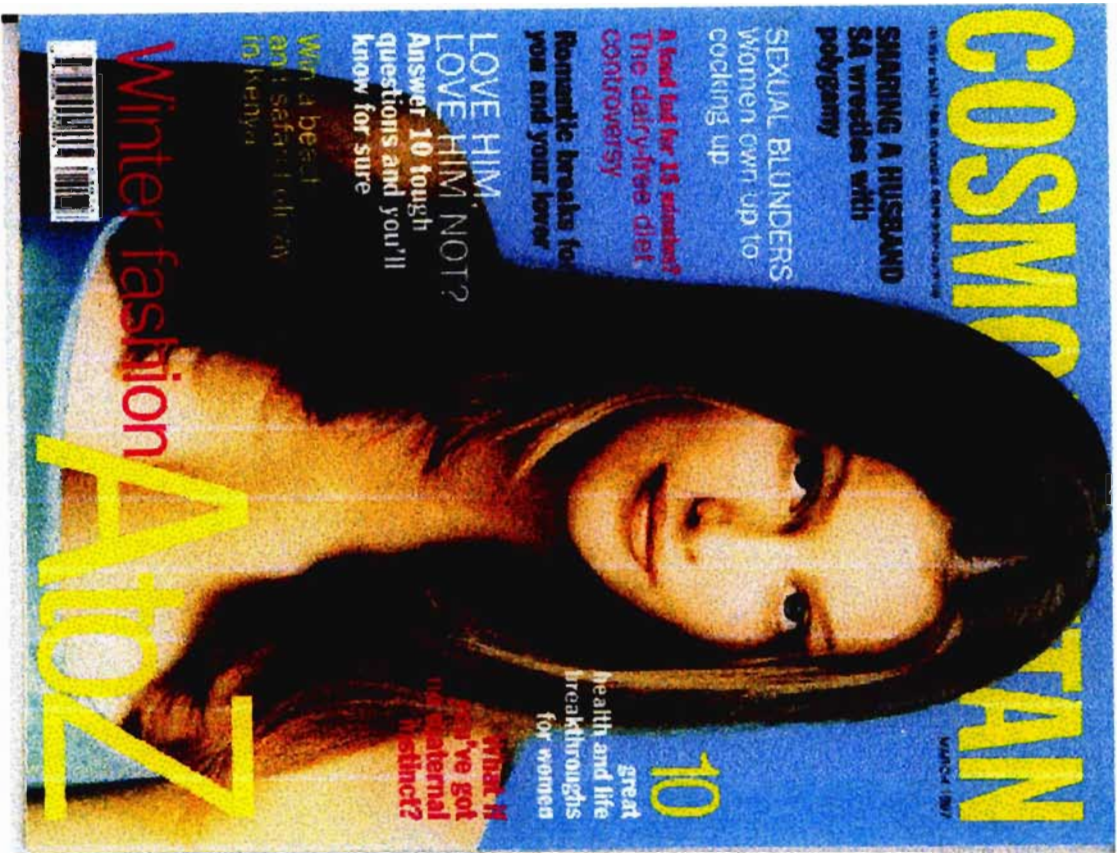


Figure 3.i

TRUE LOVE
INSIDE
APRIL 1997

PHOTO COVER
STORY ON PAGE 20
Cheryl Carpio dressed by Norel
Photographer: Linda Scazzano
Editor: Criselle; Helena Clayton,
hair and make-up; Denise Roth-
baum; jewelry: Tang and Bether
Clayton.
Jazz: Art's share,
page 104

FEATURES

20 **VIEWS FROM THE Lighthouse**
Doris Cheryl Carpio
looks her eye on the
profession.

58 **HALLELUJAH CHORUSES**
Four gospel music
singers the nation.

104 **INNOCENCE FOR SALE**
Youth who are children
who sell for families in
poverty.

114 **SEXWISE**
What men with women
know about sex.

140 **RIGHTS-MINDED**
The laws that affect
women in South Africa
today.

PEOPLE

56 **PHONE CALL TO FORTUNE**
The joy that makes
who makes it's just per
sonal.

76 **A WOMAN'S TOUCH**
Three women who are
doing "men's" work.

82 **AT HOME WITH...**
Roder Motta da Silva
from Mozambique.

124 **CROSSING THE GREAT DIVIDE**
A social worker looks
on how big business
can build the nation.

FASHION

26 **THE COLOUR**
Purple is the look for
winter.

BEAUTY

48 **FRAMED**
The beauty of
wearing glasses.

DECOR

146 **JAZZING UP JUNK**
Creative
styling
turns
junk
into
second-hand
treasures.

110 **OPRAH: MY WONDERFUL LIFE**
The talk show star tells
her amazing story.

120 **MIRACLE WORKER**
A girl in Alexandria
who gives children a
new life in love.

HANDS ON

152 **JUST LUCKY**
Coutured
handmade
pieces for
Easter.

TRAVEL

98 **TROPICAL WONDERLAND**
Malaysian delights for
eyes, ears and taste buds.

FOOD

126 **EASTER DELIGHTS**
Festive holiday
recipes.

172 **FISHY FISHING**
How to prepare
fish in a variety
of exciting ways.

MOTHER LOVE

90 **THE SOUNDS OF MUSIC**
The advantages of
teaching your child to
appreciate music.

95 **SLEEPING DRY**
Advice for the parents
of bad snorers.

WIN

23 **A TRIP TO PARIS**
A budding fashion
designer's dream trip
from Cape Town.

55 **SUNGLASSES WORTH R12 000**
From
Cape Town.

138 **R150 000 IN PRIZES**
Is the first prize
American dream or the
first prize in life?

SPECIAL

65 **HAIR TODAY**
African hair styles
for adults and children.
Learn up junk, page 146

38 **CAREER INFO**

43 **BEAUTY NOTEBOOK**

136 **YOUNG & GIFTED**

149 **WORDSEARCH**

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160 **YOUR STARS**

164 **LETTERS**

165 **WINNERS AND STOCKISTS**

168 **COOKING WITH DORAH**

176 **YOUR TURN**

6 **VIEW FROM MY DESK**

10 **SOCIAL SCENE**

14 **LOOK OUT!**

16 **SPOTLIGHT**

24 **GETTING THERE**

34 **FASHION NEWS**

36 **FASHION NOTEBOOK**

52 **BEAUTY FLASH**

54 **A NEW YOU**

64 **MOONLY MATTERS**

86 **PARENTING BY DREAM**

94 **FAMILY NOTICEBOARD**

100 **TRAVEL FILE**

118 **JUST FOR YOU**

Figure 3.ii



On our cover: Letitia Casta, photographed by Patrick Demarchelier. Styled by Paul Casco. Hair by Eric Gohier. Makeup: Nicole Maholoff for The Clin Salon NYC. Bookend her look with makeup from Berke's Virtual Violet eyeshadow. Her sleek Galaxy Makeup is made with Rose Petal New Complexion Blank. Her eyes: Galaxy Eyes Shadow in Forest Light and Violet X-mas with Galaxy Lash in Intense Black. Her lips: Volcano lipstick in Pink Told. Her scent: Chloé's Scent by Chloé

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Can love be an illusion? By Jane Green

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The female urge to make over their men By Sean Thomas

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Are you brave enough to answer these questions? By Mira Kanchanarum

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By Naomi Cunniff

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SEXUAL BLUNDERS

Women's most embarrassing intimate moments

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SHAPING A HUSBAND - SA WRESTLES WITH POLYGYNY

Alot Dood investigates the local angle

70 MATERIAL INSTINCT

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If you're not overwhelmed with maternal instinct - as you ever be? By Laura Marcus

74 SA STORIES

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Rave - the fuel that won't stop. By Nick Paul

78 TRUE STORIES

3 STORIES OF BETRAYAL

Three lies, one truth

82 CELEBRITY

READY, EDDIE, GO!

Nasty Eddie Murphy's comeback. By Miranda Sawyer

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Truth or fluff? Astrologer Red Stuehn and skeptic David Speroff weigh in

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A selection of romantic weekend getaways. Compiled by Alex Dodd

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An ancient Chinese martial art can improve mental wellbeing and fitness. By Manka Bostrom

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THE DAIRY-FREE CONTROVERSY

Is there anything in dairy-free diets? Lindsay Wright investigates

131 THE SMART WOMEN'S MEDICINE CABINET

Convenient and effective remedies for emergencies at home. By Rachael Rubin

134 THE PERFECT MOVE FOR INNER THINGS

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41 BEAUTY UPRIGHT

IF IT'S IN, IT'S IN HERE!

food & decor

138 LIFESTYLE

WORKING STYLE

Tasty treats and creative ideas to brighten up life at the office. By Philippa Chelitz and Lauren Patterson

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IF IT'S IN, IT'S IN HERE!

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THE A TO Z FOR WINTER '97

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KEEP YOUR JOB AND GET AHEAD

By Paula Dwyer

160 SUCCESS STORIES

2 ON TOP

By Tanya Farnham and Martin Gower

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By Jane Kutz

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REPORTER

THESE PICTURES PAINT A THOUSAND WORDS

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168 WATCH THESE FACES

MAGGIE BYRNE'S HURDCOIN

DEAR COSMOPOLITAN

COSMO IN APRIL

168 PS

4 SOLO WOMAN'S LAMENT

By Barbara Rubin

wins

48

SHERRIFF INTERNATIONAL FASHION AWARDS

SA's young fashion talents stand a chance to team up with the world's top designers

150 AFRICA DREAMING

Win a trip for two to Kenya Plus £10,000 worth of Etro's exclusive products to take home



Figure 3.iii

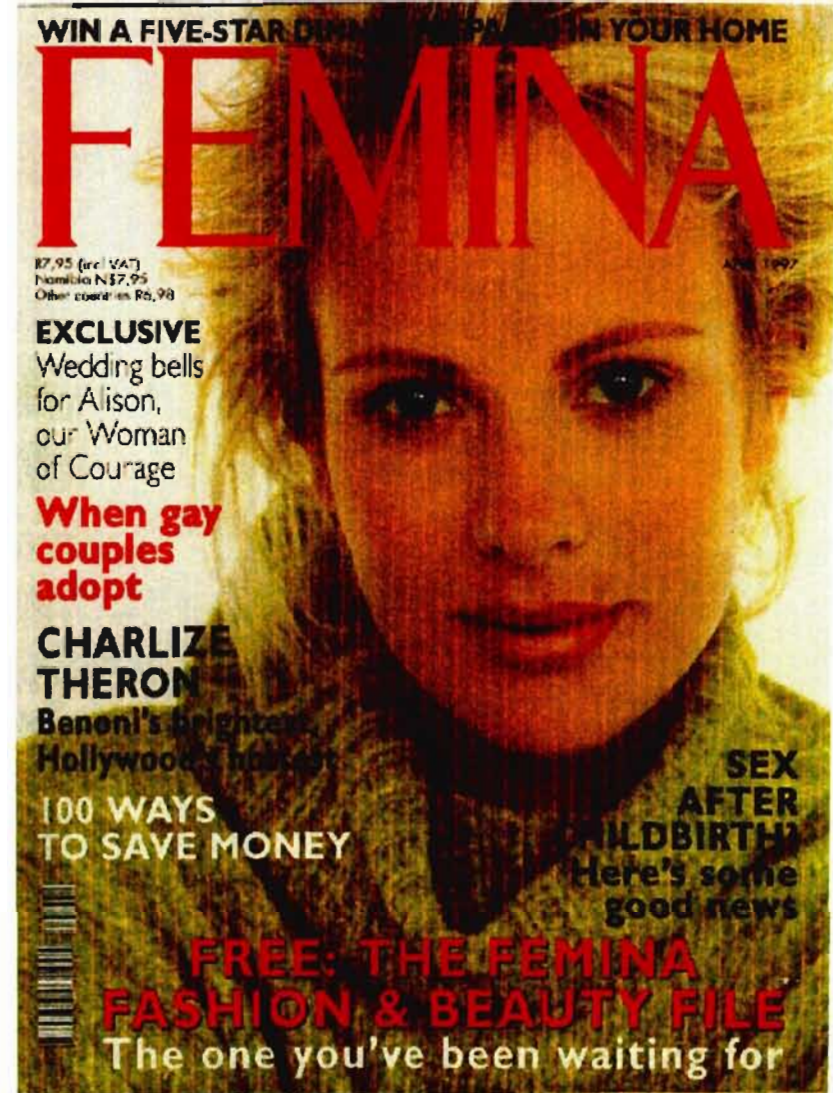
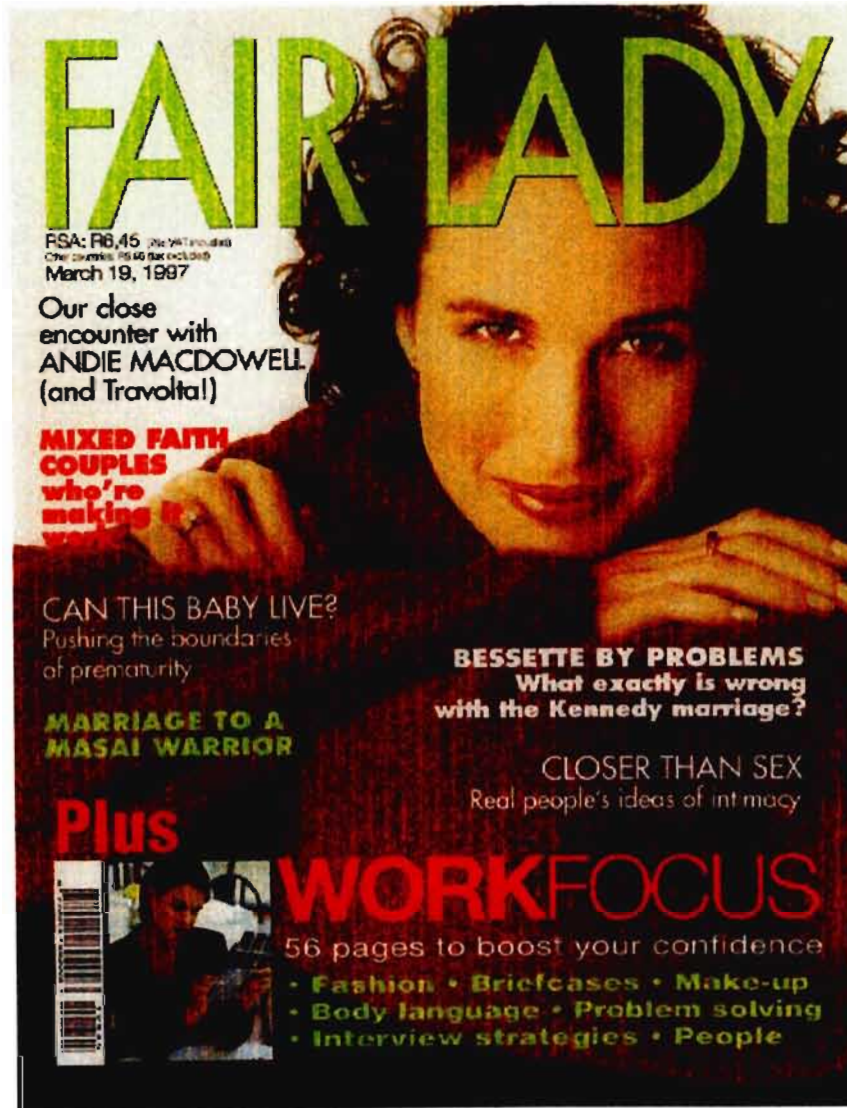


Figure 3.iv



32

Fashion
workshop



ON THE
COVER

Beauty editor
Michelle Kwan
models a look
inspired by the
1940s. She's also
wearing a pair of
sunglasses that
she designed
with us.



FAIR LADY

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COVER STORY



50

VENUS AT
HER BEST

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get a new look

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Time to
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your style

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Time to
update
your style

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Time to
update
your style

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COVER STORY

50

VENUS AT
HER BEST

Figure 3.v

FEMINA YOUR FIRST CHOICE

ON THE COVER

Face: Natural Perfection
Make-up in Soyuz. Cheeks:
Joues Contraste in Soufflé.
Eyes: Gold from the Ors
Vielres Eye Colour
Collection and pale bronze
from the Variations Eye
Colour Collection 25. Cils
Magiques Crème Mascara in
Noir. Lips: Hydrobalm Lipstick
in Miel Rouse. All by Chanel.
Photograph: Gerco Gena.
Model: Jacqui de Boss.
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Johan of Monopole. Styling:
Hedi Lampert Kemper.
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Figure 3.vi

the ability to move into a reconceptualised, more democratically representative South African identity. As Neil Bierbaum sees it, the erstwhile white South African women's titles "have managed to create a finely-balanced multiracial feel, which makes them appealing for both aspirant and successful black women while keeping their white readerships" (1995:61).

In attempting to devise a response to local women's magazines which is at once critically reflexive and potentially sympathetic, the point has not been to pan what many critics would consider to be a body of overtly traditional women's titles: *Living & Loving*, perhaps, or *Essentials*. Instead, I have wished to start unravelling the tangled network of possibilities and constraints which declaredly progressive women's magazines might represent for many South African women. Within this popular field of experience, 'the modern' and 'the contemporary', for instance, while criticised on some occasions as banal and demeaned, are not inevitably perceived as dubious academic signifiers demanding of suspicious deconstruction. They might be hankered after as symbolic of economic progress, female liberation, political development, and broadly 'human' possibility. Whatever the iniquities and unevennesses of South Africa's protracted entry into the modern, the discourses of 'modernity' that are articulated and rhetoricised in women's magazines – the impulses of futurity which inform the better/happier/new and improved registers of this female genre – might be felt by many South African women to have meaningful bearing upon both South Africa's national future and upon their more intimate personal subjectivities.

Within the scope of a single Chapter I cannot discuss either a wide range of women's magazines or a wide range of illustrative material from these titles. This form of circumscription applies even to full-length monographs on the subject of women's magazines, where the writers offer pre-emptive disclaimers that the data is not "fully representative – the sample is small, and neither systematically chosen or controlled" (Ballaster *et al* 1991:127). Janice Winship ventures that she faced analogous difficulties when trying to establish an adequate sample of contemporary British women's titles for her volume *Inside Women's Magazines* (1987). Like Winship's study, moreover, the work of Joke Hermes (1993 and 1995) attests that the social sciences category of 'sample' is never the guarantor of critical distance since the researcher is implicated in the selection. In working with the narratives which comprise women's magazines, the references which I make direct the reader of the Chapter to material from editions which appeared more-or-less coterminously: March/April 1997. This allows me both to manage an otherwise ever-proliferating range of text, and to work for some kind of historically-contextualised, rather than simply universal, 'truth'. At the same time, however, since all the studies on women's magazines that I consulted cross-reference to any editions of a magazine which might corroborate their argument, I have also used the method of outward reference, crossing the boundaries of my March/April 1997 'sample' for the purposes of illustration and clarification.

The critical method of the Chapter is informed by analogous boundary crossings in relation to the question "To what extent can we consider women's magazines to be closed *and/or* open discourses?" While this investigative paradigm has flaws, it usefully allows for various acknowledgements of texts, readers and contexts, and for the conception of culture as both product and practice. The model recognises that while women's magazines are implicated in power relations and pleasures that are often unequally and asymmetrically experienced, this also renders them by their very nature shifting, and subject to surprising sorts of agency and intervention. Thus an ambivalent response to women's magazines becomes understandable: the texts are as much about women's contradictory investments in images and ideas as about their unqualified endorsement of a Female narrative that is either prescriptive or liberatory. The recognition of narrative as fractured and unstable is hardly innovative in itself, given that

narratology has over the last decade managed, in extremely sophisticated ways, to theorise not only narrative continuities but disjunctures. Still, it seems a comparatively original approach in my attempt to take issue with the tendency by critics to dismiss women's magazines as superficial-cum-repressive forms.

An emphasis on textual control and an unwillingness to acknowledge women's agency as readers has characterised both intellectual and more popular responses to women's magazines. To begin with, here is but one example. In a short piece entitled "A Woman Needs a Magazine Like a Fish Needs a Bicycle" (playing on the familiar feminist slogan), Phil A. Page takes on the 'range' of South African women's magazines, characterising them as follows: *Cosmopolitan* ("purple boardroom boudoir"), *Fair Lady* ("bleeding heart... porcelain Pollyanna politics"), *Woman's Value*, *Your Family*, *Living and Loving* (a "Shackled...trinity of Mommy mags"), *Femina* (fills a "Royalist; commonsense, fun-loving but essentially prissy gap between puberty and menopause") and *Femme* ("Vaguely Voukish [sic] and aching to be French") (1986:13). Page's comments are tricky to work with, as the degree of gadfly wit in the article is difficult to judge. The byline 'Phil A. Page' in *Frontline* magazine, for instance, is clearly a parodic pun on 'Fill a page'. Yet the article summarises the familiar derision meted out to the women's magazine genre both in South Africa, and internationally. (In another, similar piece – also shaped by the space constraints of its A4 size – Page turns his attention to women's magazines which are marketed at black South African women, categorising *Thandi* and *True Love* respectively as "a fabulous fantasy homeland" and "a model for escape" [1987:31].)

Page's criticisms sometimes hit the mark. Even the woman who turns to a particular woman's magazine for mildly structured relaxation will on occasions have been irked by such things as the moralising or self-congratulatory tone of an article, the failure of the text to provide her with enduring satisfaction, and the proportion of patronising, or simply out-of-touch images of women in advertisements. Page is also alert to the importance of the late-1980s historical context within which he writes, and aware of the influence that *individual* editors may exert over the editorial tone, content and appearance of a particular women's magazine brand, despite publishers' attempts to imagine for each title an identifiable, enduring *house* style. Under the editorship of Dene Smuts in the mid-to-late-1980s, for instance, *Fair Lady* might well have struck some readers as gushingly matronising in its overtly liberal-leftist political stance, and its insistent injunction to 'uplift the underprivileged'. (This despite the likelihood that the effort at explicit sociopolitical conscientising was in retrospect politically commendable. It certainly led to Smuts's falling out of favour with publishers and advertisers. She is now a member of Parliament on a Democratic Party ticket.)

Page's assessment, then, should not be dismissed as completely erroneous. What is problematic, however, is his bombastic emphasis on the supposedly facile quality of the women's magazine as a genre, and his conviction that meaning can be read directly off text. Indeed, his own will to ignore conceptual contradictions in his critique of women's magazines is perverse testimony to the misrepresentations which his reading entails. For example, he derides a title like *Fair Lady* for having "developed an over-riding social conscience" which demanded "overtly political content" in every issue (1986:13), but at the same time he rebukes the genre of 'the woman's magazine' for being obsessed with sex, fashion and the family to the exclusion of the political. One is left uncertain about the kinds of ideological orientation and subject matter which would be deserving of his endorsement. The assumption seems to be that 'the women's magazine', whatever its content and title (never mind its readership or the contexts of production and consumption) is *intrinsically* a spurious form.

Struggle and the Autobiographical Element

In comparison, my own theorising of women's magazines has been characterised by struggle. The Gramscian-derived phrase 'site of struggle' has become something of a truism in cultural studies critique (analogous to the plot, theme, and character analyses which once held sway in English Studies). But it remains the case that to imagine women's magazines in this way has provided a compelling metaphor for the difficulties of a research agenda which has required me self-consciously to consider the comparative powers, pleasures, agencies and persuasiveness of my own varied 'uses' of women's magazines. It has even necessitated struggle with the assumption that the 'negotiation' of meaning involves *consciously* striving to articulate one's complex position, with *a clear object in view*.

As I have come to see, it is difficult to establish absolutely valid and invalidating agendas in relation to women's magazines. To give but a small example: although some critics claim the value of 'women's health topics' being aired in magazines like *Cosmopolitan*, many are critical of the magazine's emphasis on sexuality. At the same time, other women's magazines are criticised for routinely displacing female sexuality into the supposedly vacuous, because 'unrealistic', rhetoric of romantic love. And what of domesticity? Again, several of the more traditional titles take the lash for trading in domesticity, but when other contemporary magazines attempt to shift this preoccupation, they are taken to task for merely rearticulating domestic demands "in the shape of articles on food and homes that express 'personal style'" (Ballaster *et al* 1991:140). As I illustrate in this Chapter, such critical contradictions imply that the ideological terrain associated with women's magazines is uncertain rather than easily mapped.

Like several other researchers into women's magazines, I draw on an uneasy alliance between the practices of close reading and reader reception in trying to "demonstrate the complexity of the relations between those economic, ideological and social factors that go into 'reading' magazines in late-twentieth century culture" (Ballaster *et al* 1991:126). If my method has a number of predecessors, however, I also hope to show that very few commentators have been able to grant the degrees of complexity which I believe necessary in conducting research into women's magazines and their readerships. For instance, while several researchers admit to moments of contradiction in the discourses popularised in women's magazines, they insist that contradiction is finally recuperated in the service of the text's conservative ideology. Increasingly, though, I am persuaded that the textual analysis of magazine material does not involve the presentation of pre-existing, objective or ostensibly descriptive evidence, but a critical representation which is inevitably filtered through the beliefs, positionings and contextualised social identities of the researcher. How else, I am tempted to ask, can one account for the divergent readings of very similar material from women's magazines offered by researchers like Michele Mattelart (1986) and Hilary Radner (1995). Mattelart takes a position of radical Left critique from within the contexts of Chilean economic and political upheaval in the mid 1970s and roundly condemns 'the bourgeois media apparatus' as instrumental in containing revolution. Radner, a contemporary North American intellectual, writes with a knowledge of the historical and intellectual lessons of marxism, feminism, postmodernism and new feminism, developing an equivocal argument sensitive to the paradoxes of mass-mediated rhetorical control alongside proliferating scope for individual choice.

The method with which I work (for the 'moment' of this Chapter) skews away from a linear critical trajectory towards a more incremental logic of advancing and returning, fitting and starting, cognising and *re*-cognising, resituating responses and re-imagining connections. Such struggle over meaning has come to seem appropriate. The kind of patterning which characterises my critical reading – here and there, there and now, now and then, apparently random but also

susceptible to management – is admirably suited to the multivalent accommodations of several kinds of texts, readers and contexts which are necessary in writing about women's magazines. This may sound unwieldy. It is. But it is also a research burden – a pleasing refrain *and* a baggage – crucial to the kind of flexible conceptual narrative which I have come to consider important in responding critically to women's magazines. As Radner proposes: academics, especially those of feminist conviction, might

learn from women's magazines as a pedagogical model, one that meanders yet remains contained, that offers information within a heteroglossia of narratives rather than from a univocal position, that accumulates rather than replaces, that permits contradiction and fragmentation, that offers choice rather than conversion as its message. (1995:135)

The method and procedure of this Chapter, then, form a significant part of the argument and relate to the ongoing formation of my theoretical self. The Chapter materialises my own interests in 'the women's magazine', a genre with which I have most regular contact in its local forms, despite being familiar with, and occasionally reading, international titles. My readings of 'the women's magazine' involve awkward overlaps in roles, a difficulty recognised by Winship (1987) in her study of three magazine titles chosen for their implication in her own life. I am an informal reader of magazines, a university-affiliated and sponsored researcher, and a teacher of an undergraduate lecture series and a postgraduate seminar programme on several South African magazines. Yet I am never precisely certain – still – of how and when these roles intersect. Perhaps it is enough, for now, that I am conscious of being variously 'interpellated'? Six times a year, for instance, in an envelope which addresses me as 'media studies researcher', I receive unsolicited in the mail a media-marketing journal published by NatMags called *MagFocus*, which is branded a product "For Magazine People". I undoubtedly fall into this category as a researcher, a more-or-less 'professional' occupation which might be regarded as analogous to those of the magazine publishers, advertisers, account executives, and media planners who, judging from the content and editorial, comprise the primary audience of the journal. This assumption is bolstered by the probability that *MagFocus* obtained my identity and contact address from an issue of *Cosmopolitan* which published my letter inviting readers to contribute to a magazine research project. Yet I can also be classified as a 'magazine person' in terms of my leisure pursuits as informal reader of magazines. So the relaxed readings, research tactics and teaching tactics are messily interrelated, and they allow me to shape my findings into a collection of readings and rereadings which suggest that the critical reading of women's magazines is valuable in the context of English Studies.

The autobiographical aspect of the Chapter need not prove disquieting: if personal anecdote cannot substitute for theoretical discourse, much women-oriented theory has affirmed a connection between experience and criticism. Accordingly, it seems apposite to allow that a Chapter on women's magazines, a genre central to the western conception of the female self and, increasingly, to women's self-reflexive imagining of 'identity' (Winship 1987), will also involve criticism as autobiography. The Chapter must chart its own (imagined) history: its starting out, starting over, and continuation into a far-from-finished present. Despite Roland Barthes' elegant argument concerning the need for literary expression to convert the indexical symbol 'I' into a second degree 'he' which has nothing to do with subjectivity (1975), more recent theory, particularly that produced by women, articulates the need for critics to develop a greater awareness of their constructed identities. Nicole Ward Jouve takes this point to at least one of its logical conclusions in her essay, "Criticism as Autobiography", explaining that the critical enterprise constructs and expresses permutations of critical selfhood. Jouve muses that there

is now a massive body of criticism on autobiography. Autobiography as practice as well as theory. How pervasive it is. How writing the self is invented, constructed, projected. Or remains poised on the

threshold. Yet it never seems to occur to the critics who say such wise things that they themselves, through writing, may be in the process of inventing or projecting themselves. The critical genre, it seems, makes its adepts feel that they are being miraculously transported on a magic carpet from which they can survey...the operations of the rest of humankind, the common herd of writers as it were. They themselves are removed from the obligation of having to bother with the self that writes. They inhabit a secure, objectified, third-person mode that protects them from having to be self-aware. (1992:113)

No doubt my own critical tactics never completely coincide with the role envisaged by Jouve for an autobiographical self-consciousness in theoretical practice. But in relation to women's magazines it is important that the Chapter acknowledge critical reconsiderations and shifts which admit to intellectual momentum and struggle in my identity as writer, to diffusion and even elements of confusion, rather than relying on the facade of a declarative, apparently irrefutable, all-explanatory thesis. If I have moved forward from the time at which I was first obliged to attempt a conscious, critically self-reflexive organisation of my response to 'the women's magazine', that momentum carries in itself both the energies of re-evaluated positions, and some degree of intellectual sedimentation. If I have repeatedly rethought my positions on women's magazines, I continue, given my practice as a teacher of English studies, to feel myself compelled to offer some degree of 'morally-resonant', guiding assessment of the material with which I am dealing.

The initial stimulus for my research into women's magazines was pedagogical: the brief was to teach this form in a course on mass and popular culture which included black South African protest theatre, extracts from the adventure novels of Wilbur Smith and H. Rider Haggard, and examples of worker poetry from the (black) South African factory floor. The democratic ideal underpinning the course design implied that 'popular' culture was worth studying and that an analytical reading of women's magazines would reveal women's habitual stereotyping in the mass media, while an encounter with forms of contemporary black culture would convey the vitality and validity of an oppressed people's struggle against apartheid capitalism. These were admirable objectives: certainly, I believed that some groups of people – women, black women, black people generally – were oppressed who ought not to be oppressed, and that some forms of popular, contemporary material – blockbuster novels, magazines, newspapers, and performance poetry, among others – had been marginalised in the traditional English Department syllabus when they ought to have been studied.

It did not strike me as odd that in teaching something called 'the women's magazine' I would be reading through peculiarly academic filters; or that I read magazines with varieties of enjoyment and irritation in my free time; or that the slot I taught was envisaged as one which would reveal to young women the pervasive and inescapable extent of their victimisation.

The preparation for the course on women's magazines took me through various bodies of theory and time and again I encountered the conviction that women's magazines and their audiences were dupes of the system, irresponsible escapists complicit in their own banality-cum-blindness. The scarcity of the material, in retrospect, was equalled only by its insistently negative tone. Outrage, ridicule, pity, scorn, diatribe, debunking...these are some of the characteristic responses and forms which I encountered, and which, pasted and patched into an eclectic critical armoury, allowed me to stand up with intellectual authority before a class of over three hundred undergraduates. I did not see that my preparation for the course was by no means the beginning of my magazine reading; that from at least one perspective, I knew and used these texts. In the context of the everyday, I possessed a form of personal authority. But given the metaphors of drug addiction and dependence through which readers of women's magazines have frequently been dismissed, I understood that such knowledge was best suppressed: my unofficial literacy in women's magazines was rightly devalued cultural capital within academic structures whose

disciplinarity and rigour was premised on more abstract, objective, scholarly criteria. It was legitimate to critique the magazines as compromised forms; but to admit to reading them with any enjoyment or curiosity would have cast me as: (a) stupid (b) victimised (c) masochistic (d) all of the above. The prevailing critical idea (especially for researchers with a marxist-feminist interest) seemed to be that magazines for a female audience were restrictive, stereotypical, constraining. Further, since I was teaching in the South African context of apartheid, it seemed imperative that I *distance* myself from what were unambiguously perceived to be the products of racial capitalism, rather than work through the paradoxes either of such an absolute response, or of the appeal, for many readers, of mass-circulated cultural forms.

So I stood up and explained with zeal that women's magazines were the oppressive instruments of patriarchal capitalism.

The Negative Critique: a Persistent Response

This form of critique was in the mid-to-late 1980s the one most available to me (both *morally*, in terms of my imagined position as a progressive white South African, and *intellectually*, in terms of the theories of mass culture that would then have enjoyed the most credible academic circulation.) Yet the past continues into the present: for many in South African English Studies, I am willing to venture, a lack of knowledge about alternatives means that a primarily negative assessment of women's magazines remains the most obvious, and even expected position for intellectuals to take. (This notwithstanding the surge of critical interest in the languages of postmodernism, new feminism and psychoanalysis.) For these reasons, let me spend some time delineating the recurrent features of the emphatically negative response. Two points are worth stressing. Firstly, I deliberately highlight the repressive ideology which is assumed by many to inform the narratives of female experience circulated in and by women's magazines, even though this is inevitably a straw figure: my 'summary' caricatures the subtleties of, and nuanced distinctions among, the critical positions of individual commentators. Yet its persuasiveness need not be called completely into question: my account is intended as a polemical illustration of a persistent and pervasive intellectual tendency to derogate women's magazine material. As Morris remarks of the elements of hyperbole in her paper on shopping malls: "To describe this conflict briefly, I shall give it the form of an over-coherent, paranoid story" (1993b:311). A subsidiary purpose of my summary, though, is indeed to give real substance to what often seems to surface in passing dismissals of women's magazines as a critique premised on 'absence' and mere conviction, rather than on a detailed familiarity with the idioms used in ideology critique. For the purposes of the Chapter, if I am seriously to address my differences with this position, I need to grant it serious space.

For the critic persuaded primarily of the negativity of women's magazines, these are apparently banal but actually insidious cultural forms, powerful weapons in the service of an exploitative internationalising Capital, and its weapon, advertising. Women's magazines are designed to encourage women to accept their sociocultural inferiority, and this passivity is successfully accomplished by encouraging women to consume goods, or the promises of a better life which consumption offers. Particularly pertinent in the context of research into South African women's magazines are the pathbreaking comments of Anne McClintock. Referring to local titles she insists that every

bright, transfixed image that rises from the pages of *Fair Lady* or *Darling* is entirely constituted by two things. The first is the invisible metabolisms of financial interest which the magazine's sole task is to maintain. The second is the equally invisible but only slightly less powerful gaze of the man. Everything that happens between the pages of the woman's magazine is contoured to meet the needs

of these interests...Nothing that is said in print in the magazine can compete with, or detract from, the wholly determining power of the photographic image. (1978:18)

McClintock's conviction is that because women's magazines depend on advertising revenue, they are slaves to advertisers and obliged to compel readers towards consumption. The most forceful weapon in the commodified arsenal McClintock considers to be the glossy, touched-up 'model' image, which graphically illustrates for women their own physical inadequacies, and the potential of consumption to redress these flaws. Since the manipulative hidden persuaders are in the service of capitalism, they provoke women to consume by giving the stimulating illusion of newness and change which is in reality a narrative of perpetual inadequacy. Women must continually see their bodies and themselves as needing the improvement which only the consumption of products can provide. The embedded principle is that women may *think* magazines are fun and enjoyable, but this misconception merely points to women as victims of insidious socio-economic and cultural forces. These powers persuade women to stay within the boundaries of a consensual Womanhood, a set of norms and expectations that determines what constitutes appropriate femaleness. Despite their ostensible differences in editorial emphasis and target readerships, then, all women's magazines trade in a mythologised Femaleness that serves the status quo. As Chinyelu Onwurah expresses it (and I recollect having felt vindicated in finding a *black woman* to corroborate my early position), despite "all their superficial radicalism"

glossy magazines perform a considerable service for the established sexist, racist, but above all capitalist, order of things. They typify a specific caricature of modern woman, for women en masse to emulate and assimilate into their values; the New Ideal Woman. She is white, hetero, confident and partnered. She has a Dulux glossy-but-hard-as-nails coating to hide any irregularities or realities. She may be feminist, but since the glossies are about as feminist as playschool and not half so innovative, she poses no threat to the status quo. (Onwurah 1987:41)

The implication here is that women's magazines in their very existence reinforce the assumption that women's biological femaleness must be extrapolated to mark women as a socially and culturally distinct human grouping. Further, women's magazines happily exploit the paradox that being 'Woman' is associated with a special, inherent knowledge derived from biology, at the same time as the discourses of female culture prevalent in the texts assume that women need to acquire femaleness and to be advised and instructed in female knowledge. For the negative critic, the women's magazine is a closed genre which inculcates women into a normative female narrative. The point would probably be that women's magazines exploit longstanding binarisms and are thus compelling agents of socialisation. Women's magazines are among those social institutions in which "masculine and feminine qualities [are] transmitted, reinforced and rearticulated" (Mattelart 1986:8). The assumptions and desired effects are that girls "will be docile, submissive, clean, chaste, prudish; they will play quiet games and enjoy indoor activities. Conversely, boys will be sexually aggressive, prone to show off their physical strength, encouraged to develop their 'innate' sense of leadership, and so forth" (Mattelart 1986:8). Titles like *Cosmopolitan*, *Fair Lady*, *Femina* and *True Love*, then, discipline women's identity by requiring that women survey themselves repeatedly through the lenses of beauty, fashion, home decoration, entertainment, romantic love and sexuality. They associate women primarily with the discursive regimes of privacy, emotions and domesticity, in the immediate forms of relationships, the personality, the family and the home. Moreover, while these are in fact socially and institutionally structured domains of the feminine, the magazines misguidedly give individual women personal responsibility for shaping them. Where they *do* gesture towards collectivity, it is only superficial – an emphasis on all women as being universally united in female biology and interests. Women's magazines allow that there may well be differences amongst women – of race,

class, religion, ethnicity and so on – but assume that all female individuals are somehow connected by ‘virtue’ of their gender.

In constructing a more detailed sense of the negative position, it is useful to turn to Ballaster *et al* (1991), who in their study of the British women’s magazine market iterate that by

1900 most of the characteristic elements of the late-twentieth century women’s magazine were already being used in different combinations.... There were the short stories and serials (almost always romantic), the articles on housekeeping, childcare and family relationships, the recipes, the fashion-plates and pull-out dress patterns, the letters pages addressing ‘personal’ problems, dress, appearance or medical matters, the illustrated articles about the famous and royal, the competitions, the gossip columns, the advertisements for aids to beauty and home. (1991:118)

Ballaster *et al* maintain that regularly repeated generic, formal elements (covers, advertisements, contents pages, letters pages, advice columns, interviews) and thematic subject matters (fashion, beauty, relationships, decor, entertaining, advice, romance, sex, celebrity), are constitutive of ‘the women’s magazine’ as a genre, and comprise crucial apparatuses of discursive and ideological control. The conventional features, in other words, popularise feminised narrative patterns which readers recognise in a text, and through which they come to make sense of the copy and images. It is through these patterns that the audience comes to adopt a female subject position. Women’s magazines, in assuming women as their primary subject, have over many years established themselves as technologies for the regulation of women into desirable codes of femininity. While the magazines might alter significantly over time in terms of quality of reproduction, tone and even permissible subject matter, it is forms and themes such as those referred to above which have persistently defined ‘the women’s magazine’ and hence the naturalised figure of ‘Woman’ (Ballaster *et al* 1991:118).

Let me elaborate on continuity of genre – the areas of formal repetition in women’s magazines. Since the points I explore can with a little self-application also be used to theorise repeated areas of theme and subject matter – beauty, sexuality, home, family, leisure, lifestyle, consumption, individualism, and so on – there is no purpose served in enumerating thematic repetition separately.

Looking at women’s magazines as repressive sociocultural documents, the dystopian critic makes much of the convention that the front covers repeatedly “try to create an idealized reader-image of the group advertisers seek to reach, by using a photo of a woman – usually a close-up of her smiling face” (McCracken 1996:97). The front covers are considered representative of the magazine as a whole, with images and stories which set “the limits to which the reader should aspire in terms of appearance” and ‘lifestyle’ (McRobbie 1991:113). The magazine covers feature seductive, or at least conventionally celebrated female icons, chosen for their correspondence to existing standards of beauty, success and attractiveness: the famous name and face of Andie MacDowell for *Fair Lady*, or the anonymous (to the uninitiated) faces gracing the covers of *Femina* and *Cosmopolitan*. (See Figures 3.iv and 3.i.) With their model faces (a set of regular features which prefigures the regular features and generic categories to be found inside the magazine?), the covers enclose and limit femaleness; they model for the reader a set of preferred female codes and behaviours: intimacy, attractiveness, individualism....As a device, covers offer “readers ideological positionalities” (McCracken 1996:99) and

function as an interpretative lens for what follows by offering us pre-embedded definitions through the magazine’s title, the headlines, and the photo. Syntax, tone, color, visual images of ideal beauty and success, and covert images of consumption work to position us favorably to the magazine’s content. (McCracken 1996:100)

Even in the case of the ANC’s Cheryl Carolus, featured on the cover of *True Love*, the image is designed to borrow from the feminised codes typical of the women’s magazine genre. (See Figure

3.i.) It is not Carolus's political agency that is foregrounded, but her appearance, and she is as far as possible styled to resemble 'the cover girl'. Thus the "covers of women's magazines with their obligatory female model or famous person become the outward sign of the concern with appearance which characterises both medium and message", both glossy quality and the emphasis on looking good (Ballaster *et al* 1991:118). The implication is that a woman's looks are her best investment. Marjorie Ferguson concludes "that the covers of women's magazines present the face of 'femaleness' as the face of the traditional woman – the smiling pleaser our culture" demands (1978:113).

If the front cover is "the magazine's most important advertisement" (McCracken 1996:97), advertising as a generic feature of women's magazines is frequently regarded by critics as instrumental in magazines' socially regulative function: women's magazines are designed to deliver groups of consumers to advertisers. Advertising has become crucial to the genre, in that since the cover price does not meet production costs these must be carried by page rates. Critics of women's magazines point to the fact that women have long been identified as a market central to the successful functioning of capitalism. Since the 1890s, women's magazines in Britain have sought to link commodity consumption to their production of 'ideal' femininity, both of which are in turn implicated in the visual pleasure of looking and looking attractive (Ballaster *et al* 1991:115). In other words, women have been persuaded to consume in order to be completely and properly female, and it is precisely by means of the appealing 'look' of the products being advertised that adverts secure this consumption. ('Appeal' has been enhanced with the advent of sophisticated technologies which facilitate accurate colour and image reproduction, and with the frequent displacement of commodity status from the product *per se* onto the model-cum-celebrity.) The advertisements prey on women's anxieties, insecurities and fantasies about appearance, sexuality, health, relationships, family life and so on. About one third of the total page count of a single issue of any women's magazine tends to be made up of advertisements.

In emphasising women's magazines as repressive forms primarily in the service of Capital, critics often point to the ways in which advertising functions as an agent of consumer culture, in that it endlessly circulates and thereby naturalises the kinds of roles which women may occupy in society, and the kinds of images of women which are deemed 'desirable'. These images usually involve the sexual objectification of women, and the idealisation of woman as Beauty (which may or may not be linked to an 'emotional' beauty in which woman is Mother and Caregiver). These critics allege that women's magazines perpetuate conventional assumptions about what is and is not appropriate female beauty, behaviour and beliefs: *face* make-up, but often subtle, giving the illusion of naturalness; removal of facial, leg and underarm body hair, yet preferably a full head of long hair; pleasurably active yet responsible heterosexuality; satisfaction through some form of employment beyond the home, but nevertheless still the primary family caregiver and domestic manager.....: these are the kinds of gendered trajectories repeatedly given for women in the advertising that sustains the women's magazine, and critics frequently ask whose interests women's magazines are likely to serve, those of Capital, or those of readers?

Questions such as these are exacerbated when we consider the increasing use of so-called advertorials with their sponsored images and page rates. It was once fairly easy to describe women's magazines as having separate editorial and advertising departments: one department whose members were responsible for organising, writing, and/or syndicating the feature articles, images and similar material, and another department which sold advertising space in the magazine to advertisers and their agents. These ads would have been written and devised by advertising agencies on behalf of the company that was selling the product. Although such ads clearly continue to appear in women's magazines, there is increasing use of a discourse which is not

immediately announced as advertisement. Instead, despite the small-print wording 'advertorial' which appears near the top of the page, these 'hidden persuaders' are difficult to distinguish from the editorial copy as they mimic the house tone and style of the magazine. Advertorials and promotional features are generally written by the magazine's own journalists in the magazine's own house style (Ballaster *et al* 1991:116), and could, in seeming to carry the magazine's endorsement and favour, be powerful incentives for readers to buy and use the products and services which are being referred to. Noteworthy, too, is the fact that a number of women's magazines also produce seasonal decor, health, or fashion and beauty supplements that are separate from the magazine proper, but enclosed within the issue by sealed plastic packaging. In effect, each supplement is a composite of advertorials and a composite advertorial for the magazine title in question, although the appearances simulate editorial copy. Moreover, many women's magazines now unambiguously brand their readers as consumers by selling goods bearing the magazine's corporate logo: a T-shirt with the words "The COSMO Girl", for instance, or a diary discreetly reproducing on its cover the *Fair Lady* masthead. Women's magazines also advertise 'special offers' in clothing or beauty products which, while they do not explicitly bear the magazine's logo, "encourage readers to define themselves as the 'ideal' reader" by using "products identified as part of the magazine's favoured 'lifestyle'" (Ballaster *et al* 1991:117). There are also other especially new – recent and innovative – forms of what is called in the advertising industry 'brand extension'. South African *Cosmopolitan* has recently offered readers an 'exclusive preview' of a new Cape Town boutique carrying affordable designer wear, for instance, and *Fair Lady* has launched a 'readers' only' Shopping Card. For those subscribing to the negative position on women's magazines, such strategies might purport to give readers a "bumper crop of unbelievable discounts and giveaways" (Coverline of *Fair Lady* September 18, 1996), but in practice they facilitate advertisers' and retailers' penetration of the market secured by the magazine. As my own Chapter should make clear, however, other positions are possible.

Both McClintock (1978) and Onwurah (1987) argue that given the prevalence in women's magazines of the visual and discursive regimes of advertising, the text's primary yet duplicitously concealed purpose is to serve the interests of Capital by persuading women to purchase and consume the goods associated with – indeed enunciative of – 'the good life' and 'the modern'. Like shopping malls, women's magazines are characterised as mechanisms of a commodified culture which depends upon individual consumption at the expense of social justice; it is advertising (and associated page costing) which forms the economic mainstay of the genre. If I somewhat labour this point, this is on account of its being central to a negative critique of women's magazines. Mattelart expresses the point with particular vehemence (and ideological correctness), insisting that modernity

allows the technocratic society to stimulate the alliance with liberating ideologies. Responding to a strategy of consumer massification, it tries to eliminate the sign of the act which it propitiates, by offering itself as a way of integration into the ideology of harmony, health and happiness. It tends to make one forget that the compulsion of consumption which unleashes deeply selfish forces, in its search for a temporary pleasure in buying, makes the consumer a prisoner. Through modernity, the act of consumption disappears as a cultural act which contributes to developing an individualistic and repressive civilisation. As we have seen, woman is at the centre of this strategy of action. Through her, all the emancipatory postulates of modernity are revealed, and through her...they are all absorbed. (1986:55)

Even in magazines addressed expressly, if not exclusively, to black women the criticism is generally that they "share the aspirational tone of the other glossies" and that "the dominant model of commodified femininity remains essentially one of individual achievement in three areas of life: career, relationships and personal appearance" (Ballaster *et al* 1991:141). Page (1986 and 1987) offers analogous criticism of *Thandi* and *True Love*.

Advertising and the front covers are not the only formal elements of women's magazines to be nominated as rendering apparently innocuous and even desirable an insidious modernity. Ballaster *et al*, for their part, also refer to letters pages and advice columns (1991:119). These forms of discourse appear regularly in many women's magazine titles, thus they are fundamental to the constructing by the periodical press of a manageable female audience. The generic continuities of the letters page appear in each of the magazines from which I have taken material, as do advice columns, which also tend to use the form of readers' letters and experts' replies. Several pages are usually reserved for general correspondence from readers, and with monotonous rhetorical regularity these are styled after codes of intimacy and personal agency: *True Love* has "Dear True Love"; *Femina* "Dear Femina" ("This is where you can have your say"); *Cosmopolitan* "dear cosmo" ("Give your views an airing; we can take everything except indifference"); and *Fair Lady* "Over to you". *True Love* also features an endpage written by a reader: "This is your chance to have your say! Whether it's something funny, topical or controversial". Over and above these pages are the advice-page letters: *Cosmopolitan*, for instance carries an Agony Column by Irma Kurtz (and has previously carried Tom Crabtree's "On the Couch"), while *Fair Lady* has Elizabeth Duncan's "Private Line" for advice. *Femina* has "The Sexpert's Guide", while *True Love* features columns such as "Health News", "Parenting by Dr M", "Career Info" and "Dear Nomsa", an advice page in which "clinical psychologist Nomsa Ntshingila will help you" with personal problems. As Ballaster *et al* argue, the personalised discourse of such pages "both enacts and addresses the idea of feminine responsibility" (1991:123), and is implicated in women's magazines' longstanding (indeed generic) presentation of "themselves as handbooks for their readers" (Ballaster *et al* 1991:145).

The letters pages and advice columns are marked by the intimate tone persistently characteristic of women's magazines since their first emergence in Britain in the eighteenth century: "The magazine will be friend, advisor and instructor in the difficult task of being a woman" (Ballaster *et al* 1991:124-125). Further, if the tone and subject matter are less spiritual and expressly Christian in many contemporary women's magazines than in their antecedents, something which reflects the growing secularisation and urbanisation of many women's experience, the secular nevertheless continues to rely on the discourse of humanist morality, presenting moral choice as it bears upon self-development. Increasingly, too, there is a reliance on the languages and emotional investments characteristic of popular psychology, which reworks the idea of the magazine as 'friend'. This trope "implicitly addresses the problem of femininity as one shared by all women, but explicitly isolates the woman at home as an individual responsible for her own conduct and being" (Ballaster *et al* 1991:125). As Lindy Wilbraham has pointed out in her (South African) article on advice columns and the psychologisation of monogamy, these psychological discourses mimic *privacy* while they institutionalise the *public* monitoring of so-called interiority and 'the self' (Wilbraham 1997). The will to personal yet shared femininity entails a feint. The intimacy works to authorise a Female narrative of privatised space, subjection to discursive control and agonised self-regulation precisely by occurring within "a public media forum" in which Authority is vested in the forbidding spectre of 'public opinion' (Wilbraham 1997:66).²

For the negative critic, a glance at the contents pages reproduced in Figures 3.ii, 3.iii, 3.v and 3.vi of this Chapter will indicate that each magazine, like women's magazines in general, also contains various regular advice-type columns: for instance, *Femina*'s "Taking Issue" and "Horoscopes: Future Options"; *True Love*'s "Family Noticeboard", "Money Matters", and "Your Stars". Several aspects of the magazines which are not explicitly announced as 'advice' thus perform the function of help and instruction. Among others there are the following: in

Cosmopolitan the quiz "Relationships: LOVE HIM, LOVE HIM NOT", a "Fashion and Beauty Special: THE A TO Z FOR WINTER '97" and the eclectic regular "INSIDER: GOSSIP, CELEBRITIES, NEWS, REVIEWS, FILMS, MULTIMEDIA, BOOKS, MUSIC, ISSUES, SA". Similarly, *Fair Lady*'s March 19 1997 issue features "MIXED FAITH COUPLES who're making it work", "CLOSER THAN SEX: Real people's ideas of intimacy" and "WORKFOCUS: 56 pages to boost your confidence. * Fashion * Briefcase * Body Language * Problem solving * Interview strategies * People". The fashion and beauty pages advise women on what clothes and make-up to buy and to wear; the recipe, entertainment and decor pages advise women on how to make various things – 'style', meals, objects for the home and family etc.; the consumer test-house material advises women on what 'time-saving household goods' perform best; articles on subjects as diverse as date rape, racial mixing, and seasonal fashion trends all instruct women in matters that society either assumes – or requires – them to be interested in. All this advice "takes the form of a recipe: skill instruction, ingredients, tools or utensils and methods for specific activities such as cooking, decorating and gardening" (Ballaster *et al* 1991:145). Thus the trope of advice and guidance may assume multiple guises, but it is precisely the pretended display of difference working in the service of a fundamental sameness that secures the regulatory power of the text. Whatever its ostensible usefulness, the content of women's magazines tends to function as a highly conventional construction of gendered relations. Women are repeatedly bombarded with pseudo-help in a number of apparently different but actually cognate rhetorical contexts with the result that they are psychologised into a female ideology that prioritises family life, and narrativises women's subjectivity as occurring essentially within this space. Even beyond the family, the advice orientation of women's magazines represents "women's responsibility for the management of the domestic and the emotional" (Ballaster *et al* 1991:145), so that in relationships of all kinds it will be a woman's female duty to calm troubled waters, hold her tongue (or voice discontent in reasonably measured tones), and provide a shoulder to cry on. For the critic intent on analysing women's magazines as constraining cultural forms, then, even a perfunctory scanning of the contents pages will reveal that the ideological assumptions upon which the magazine is premised are those of the status quo. Any differences amongst the contents pages of different women's magazines are nominal rather than substantive; the titles both represent and reinforce a female regime.

Lest this sound unremittingly punitive (and women themselves masochistic), negative critics explain that women's magazines have perfected the art of presenting advice "in a narrative, attractive and easily consumable form" (Ballaster *et al* 1991:145), such that it feels enjoyable – or at least worth it to submit to the preferred versions of the female advocated in the pages of the text. "JAZZING UP JUNK Create stunning furniture from secondhand finds" (*True Love* April 1997) or "Tasty treats and creative ideas to brighten up life at the office" (*Cosmopolitan* April 1997): this register actively *misrepresents* many of the laborious tasks associated with women's roles in human relationships – sewing, food preparation, budgeting, smoothing over friction. It constructs them not as work but as pleasurable, self-extending 'leisure' activities which are in the best interests of a woman who seeks to develop a well-rounded personality, contemporary female competence, and satisfaction with self. Thus domestic and even corporate drudgery are made to appear not only fun, but *specialist* skills. This is a trick which reinforces traditionally female expertise by having it masquerade as valued knowledge. The old-fashioned 'home-making' frequently reviled by many contemporary women is more appealingly recast as 'interior decorating' or 'cocooning'; whilst caring and nurturing acquire the professionalised gloss of complex psychological erudition. Such rhetorical strategies may appear to give status to femaleness, but actually fit women ever more firmly within narrow social roles. As I see it,

however, such responses actually concede nothing. They have no way of accounting for the appeal of women's magazines other than by assuming that women are ideological victims. For my part, I later proceed to make a case for the curious pleasures to be derived from women's magazines.

Negative critics well understand that the narrative of femininity which is represented in women's magazines does not work through force as conventionally understood, or even solely through fear. Instead, it relies on an intoxicating cocktail of persuasion, reasonableness, and promise to coax readers into a consenting subject position that 'will' (the oxymoronic imperative and futurity are not coincidental) liberate women from the female condition of domestic drudgery, economic exploitation, body problems, emotional trauma and political marginality even while infinitely deferring this utopian state.

The negative critic is also well-able to address those areas of content and image that apparently give the lie to the repressive orthodoxy that is the women's magazine genre. Even ostensibly useful pieces of advice and liberated images are merely exceptions which prove the rule. The female executive, for instance, or the woman who has acquired dramatically visible status in the public sphere, is still sufficiently remarkable to warrant comment, thus indirectly exemplifying the narrow spaces typically constraining most women. Liberal capitalism makes liberal use of the exceptional in order to showcase its ability to accommodate difference while endorsing the status quo and subtly managing the discourses of normality and difference. The idea of inoculation is also relevant here: when the covers or contents pages *do* feature images or material which seem to acknowledge positively the heterogeneity of women's experiences and which undermine the naive ideal of a transcultural, transhistoricised Femaleness, the informing principle is simply to 'inoculate' readers against something that many societies regard as being undesirable or dangerous. Thus cover stories such as *Fair Lady's* "MARRIAGE TO A MASAI WARRIOR" (March 19, 1997) or *Cosmopolitan's* "What if you've got no maternal instinct" and "SHARING A HUSBAND: SA wrestles with polygamy" (March 1997) or *Femina's* "When gay couples adopt" (April 1997), merely give readers a little of what is titillating, taboo, exotic or different, as a way of affirming the comforting normality of the capitalist, middle class, white ideological belief system underpinning the production of women's magazines. Thus the negative critic may grudgingly admit that women's magazines are characterised by contradictions: the example which immediately comes to mind is an article advocating healthy eating and bodyshape which is accompanied by an illustration depicting a youthful, Kate Moss-like thinness. Yet these contradictions are then negatively recuperated into a preferred explanation which maintains that contradiction is invariably subsumed in the pages of the text's manipulative ideology. A *disabling* 'contradiction', here, is the dubiously exciting condition of contemporary femininity.

If the exponents of a negative critique are allowed sole authority, this is the master narrative disseminated in the women's magazine. It was certainly the preferred critical trajectory which I followed in lecturing to first-year students. Most of the students politely took notes from their superior. But one confident young woman raised her hand, and her voice, to assert "But we are not victims, we actively *use* magazines. At least, *I* do not consider myself to be manipulated".

Because only a single female figure resisted the 'hegemonic solidarity' of what I at the time thought my radical feminist response to women's magazines – and because several women students who overtly styled themselves feminist later came to congratulate me on my uncompromising stand – I was easily able to reduce her agency to precisely the kind of mental colonisation which my lectures aimed to counter. I was unable to make connections between this woman's outspoken pleasure in magazines and my own closet enjoyment. Nor was I able to make connections between her/my/our pleasures in apparent capitulation to stereotypes, and the overtly

anti-pleasures taken by the politically radical young women. In retrospect, I consider myself to have been disabled less by women's magazines than by Authoritative intellectual discourses which dismissed the genre by preaching false consciousness.

Nor, looking beyond the particularly stringent ideologies which predominated in South African intellectual life of the late 1980s to the pages of the South African popular press in the late 1990s, did I discover responses more sympathetic. (I set apart, here, comments that I have derived from the business, finance and media pages, which are generally characterised by at least an understanding of the *business* of women's magazines.)

Women's Magazines and the Superficial: A Single, Popular Example

Suggestive of the continuing failure to understand women's magazines (even in the supposedly more cognate space of the newspaper press), is the satirist 'Hogarth's' column "Mandela and True Love", published towards the end of 1996 in the *Sunday Times*. My discussion of this is intended to prepare the ground for my exploration of several more astute ways in which critics might begin to recuperate the paradoxical phenomenon of women's magazines. Under the headline "Mandela and True Love", Hogarth's column reads

Attending the meeting were a host of SA's most prominent commentators, men and women who have earned the ire of the President for their controversial comments on his government's mistakes and, wait for it, TV presenter Khanyi Dhlomo-Mkhize. Hogarth hears that she attended the meeting as editor of *True Love* magazine, but a flip through some recent editions failed to show up much by way of political comment. Perhaps she was there to play agony aunt to the feuding parties. (1996:24)

True Love is a popular woman's magazine with a primarily black female readership, but the subject matter of the column also relates to two topical South African 'affairs'. Firstly, the headline cross-references to a formal meeting set up between black South African journalists and Nelson Mandela, in the wake of Mandela's rebuking of black hacks as lackeys of apartheid. This criticism was widely met by warnings that the president – like many of his National Party predecessors – was attempting to control the press. Secondly, embedded in the headline is a reference to Nelson Mandela's 'true love': his relationship, much discussed in the media, with Graca Machel, widow of the late Mozambican president, who has become his official companion.

In his opening sentence, Hogarth allows the political capacity of some women journalists, so it would be extravagant to claim that his column, provocative as it is, conveys his attitude to women in general. Yet his dismissive perception of Dhlomo-Mkhize as a mediating 'agony aunt' intersects rather too comfortably with widespread negative assumptions about a female space and I do not think it reading too much between the lines to suggest that Hogarth's remarks concerning *True Love* represent a distillation of what remains a persistent attitude to women's magazines, their management and, by implication, their readers: women's magazines are run by superficial, glossy media people, and their shallow content caters for politically-illiterate airheads in need of pre-packaged romantic-psychological advice. In his comments on *True Love*, Hogarth reproduces a naturalised, gender-implicated construction of what is – and is not – regarded as valuable cultural capital. Those who consider themselves semantically astute will say that this is effected even by those who edit and publish women's magazines: in its title, for example, *True Love* exemplifies what critics as diverse as Mattelart (1986) and McRobbie (1991) identify as the tendency of women's magazines to trade in romantic individualism and heart economics. And they might continue that a glance at the contents page of any issue of the magazine will reveal how *True Love*, like all women's magazines, works with categories such as fashion, style, beauty, decor and entertainment. Such objections are implicit in Hogarth's column. Matters of sociopolitical consequence, for Hogarth, do not and cannot include categories like the style media, advice, emotions; these are understood as being altogether distinct from the government, and

political comment. Never mind that Hogarth, here, is himself open to the kind of criticism that critics of his ilk tend to level against women's magazines: the casting of experience into compartmentalised categories which allegedly dissuade the reader from making conceptual connections between 'decor', say, and 'politics', or between 'true stories' and 'state policy'. As I suggest later in this Chapter, however, neither the generic conventions nor the content of women's magazines constitutes legitimate grounds for the dismissal of the women's magazine as a form.

As Hogarth projects things, though, 'we' are meant to be altogether incredulous to discover amongst serious, authentic journalists, so designated on account of their engaged political commentary and critique, someone as insubstantial (?), politically unaccredited (?), youthful (?), and attractive (?) a woman as Dhlomo-Mkhize. All of the above could be implied by Hogarth's locating of Dhlomo-Mkhize as an especially visible 'TV presenter' of a trendy magazine programme for MNet, South Africa's pay-television channel. Once Hogarth has discovered ('hears') that Dhlomo-Mkhize is editor of *True Love* (a magazine with which he more than likely has no sustained familiarity on account of not forming part of its implied readership), and once he has performed on several back issues his own version of investigative research, his impressions of Dhlomo-Mkhize's anomalous presence at a presidential meeting with 'proper' journalists is confirmed: she is merely a women's 'style journalist', a media cipher, an agony aunt; and *True Love* is merely a glossy. I've made a few tricky manoeuvres here, given that Hogarth's purpose is probably contentious and his remarks designed to goad: but the tautologies are not absolutely of my own making. I am left with the impression that Hogarth is reinforced in his belief that Dhlomo-Mkhize, and by extension the magazine *True Love*, are obviously politically inconsequential.

Hogarth does not even begin to map Dhlomo-Mkhize's interesting rise to a position of minor celebrity and vigorous public presence. And he cannot see that a culture of celebrity and the consumption of 'personality' intersect with the more obviously political in the figure of Mandela, rather than comprising a world apart.

If women's magazines are characterised by many as dubious or at best banal forms, careers within the women's magazine business – as well as work within associated 'style' professions such as advertising, fashion design, modelling, consumer test-bureaux, photography, styling, and make-up, are frequently sought after by women, and women in editing and management positions are often regarded as socially influential, appropriate role models for younger, aspirational women. Khanyisile Dhlomo-Mkhize is a particularly dramatic case in point. At 24 years-old, she was "the youngest editor yet to be appointed at a national women's magazine" (Fourie 1996:8). Before being promoted to editor of *True Love*, Dhlomo-Mkhize was the magazine's fashion editor, and had been variously associated with the periodical and beauty business since winning *Thandi* magazine's Face of the Year competition at age 14, the *Bona/Lux* Reach for the Stars competition two years later, and the Look of Today the year after that. In 1991 she reached the finals of *Fair Lady's* Unforgettable Woman competition, and the semi-finals of Miss South Africa, a pageant in which she has subsequently participated as a presenter. She is also a B.Com graduate. The so-called product of a politically-prominent KwaZulu-Natal family and of private schools in Pietermaritzburg and Durban, Dhlomo-Mkhize was extremely successful and popular as South Africa's youngest-ever television newsreader, having also read the news on Radio Metro, and presented the programme *Cosmo Life* on CCV television. Most visible of all, perhaps, was her long-run as newsreader for prime time news on what was then South Africa's English-speaking television channel. If correspondence and features in the print media are to be believed, and if we grant critical validity to passing conversational comment, many South Africans sat up

and noticed Dhlomo-Mkhize, considering her a remarkable – note-worthy – public figure. She combined glamorous aplomb with quiet intellectual conviction and, where necessary, humour and humility. These were unusual qualities: not only in a woman so young but, though it reveals the limitations in terms of which a ‘normal’ South African ordinary continues to be imagined, a young *black* woman. It becomes difficult to distinguish, in effect, the public from the private, the serious from the pleasurable, the political from the personal, in trying to suggest why Dhlomo-Mkhize was invested with such popular appeal. (It would no doubt merely bolster Hogarth’s derision for me to mention that Dhlomo-Mkhize was nominated in opinion-poll South Africa’s ‘Best Dressed Woman’ of 1997.)

Were Hogarth rather quicker off the mark, he might have made connections between apparently trite ‘designing women’ and Nelson Mandela. Mandela, for instance, is more-or-less globally understood to signify South Africa’s political drama of oppression and liberation. He is a man who served 27 years on Robben Island for treasonable activities against the apartheid government, and subsequently became president. But it is also true that his so-called private life, with ex-wife Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, had already attracted public interest prior to his contentious yet decorous liaison with Graca Machel. Many people expressed more interest in the scandal of the Mandelas’ tangled divorce proceedings than they did in the President’s national and international schedules. This was an interest both luridly spectacular, and sometimes poignantly empathetic for the difficulties of Mandela, ‘the man’, in his association with a charismatic woman who was renowned in her own right as gadfly to the ANC and notorious for her reputed involvement in the murder of young activist Stompie Sepei.

Moreover, if it is Nelson Mandela’s *political* clout which has led to his being repeatedly featured in more broadly understood cultural contexts, it remains true that he has frequently turned these into memorable vignettes of ‘Mandela, the man’ and ‘Madiba magic’. By virtue of his designer style, he has guest-edited an international edition of *Vogue*, and set a precedent for the public appearance of male politicians in signature casual shirts. (He is reputed to purchase his more formal attire from Johannesburg’s northern suburbs elite Dunhill shop). He has shown a willing pleasure in encouraging and being photographed with supermodels such as Naomi Campbell, with various winners of the Miss South Africa pageant, and with ‘pop stars’ like Michael Jackson and The Spice Girls. Whatever one’s individual response to such details, they do imply that Mandela cannot but be constructed as a semiotically over-inscribed cultural figure. He has been instrumental in achieving what is possibly the late-twentieth century’s most symbolically-invested democracy, and his version of a democratic ideology is popularly understood by many to be premised on a politics of personal style which encompasses both dress and friendly, approachable demeanour.

His relationship with Graca Machel is explicable in terms of similar semiotic excess. It is a ‘story’ of the kind regularly featured in women’s magazines, celebrity and personality profiles of visible public figures, whether they be Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman, or Hillary and Bill Clinton, or Tokyo and Judy Sexwale. South African women’s magazines have recently featured cover-lines reading “Our close encounter with ANDIE MACDOWELL (and Travolta!)” (*Fair Lady* March 19, 1997) and “CHARLIZE THERON Benoni’s brightest, Hollywood’s hottest” (*Femina* April 1997). Other cover-lines direct attention to stories on the loves of prominent local couples who are best-known as political figures: “GRACA & MANDELA: A Newsy Kind of Love” (*Elle* October 1996) and “Cheryl Carolus on power, passion and the Presidency” (*True Love* April 1997). Mattelart (1986) and Ballaster *et al* (1991) would probably critique this as a shallow preoccupation with romance, and hence as a problematic constraining of what might otherwise be recognised as women’s interests. Yet I would like to venture that if we allow the

paradoxes ensuing from an attachment which is interpreted as both romantic and practical, true love and official, features such as the Nelson-Graca story can also be glossed as highly visible examples of the insistently transgressive or at least unstable energies of categories which theorists prefer to designate 'public' and 'private'. The January 1997 issue of *True Love* features not only a cover story on Mandela, but Mandela on the cover, a practice and image which, in the imaginations of many readers, might unsettle the well-established women's magazine convention of the 'cover girl': in terms of gender, in terms of public-private domains, as well as in terms of a specifically local inflection of an established international practice. Yet how this cover and the related copy are read will depend not only on apparently intrinsic visual or verbal signs (or even on the writer's overt attitude towards subject matter), but also on the predilections of the reader, and critic. Thus cases can be made for the Mandela-Graca story as being an example of women's magazines' ability rapaciously to trivialise even serious matters (see for instance Thandi Moses's comments in Daymond and Lenta 1990) and/or as illustrating their culturally valuable disregard for conventional boundaries between hard and soft journalism, relevant and irrelevant experience.

Taking a Lead from Mandela: Transgressions of Public/Private Domains

My purpose is to make a case for women's magazines as ambiguous cultural forms which are made meaningful through similarly ambiguous cultural practices. One way of proceeding is to address matters of political economy and magazine production. I have already indicated that my primary purpose in the Chapter is not to devise a detailed historical survey of South African women's magazines from their inception to the present, or to trace the full genealogy of particular titles. Yet it is valuable to consider briefly some 'moments' (temporal as well as conceptual) in the ongoing history of South African women's magazines which illustrate the dynamic of repetition and difference that I consider to be characteristic of the genre. In what follows, I take 'production' to mean not simply the spectacular forms of agency involved in the publishing of a women's magazine, but the various attempts by those in professions related to the women's periodical press to produce ideas about and attitudes to, women's magazines. Understood in this way, 'production' illustrates the discursive volatility that an academic researcher should expect to encounter when theorising the South African women's magazine genre. The five sections which follow discuss: the categorising of South African women's magazines; shifting readership patterns; the launch of new titles; advertising, race and gender; and the figure of the editor. The last point has two subfacets and these headings are indicated in bold, underlined script: the role of Jane Raphaely in the making of the South African women's periodical press, and the passing of *Cosmopolitan's* editorship from Jane to Vanessa Raphaely. Overall, my discussion brings negative critique up against what Brian Braithwaite and Joan Barrell's book designates *The Business of Women's Magazines* (1988) and is intended to convey that critics might address women's magazines not through a paradigm which privileges either dismissal or celebration but a dynamic of constancy and change. I stress that this dynamic is manifest not only in obviously material matters such as staffing and audience, but also in semiotic struggles over meaning. Far from ignoring matters of political economy, I suggest, the critic who prefers to emphasise 'the cultural field' can in theorising women's magazines creatively recast exactly that set of power relations typically characterised by negative critique as exerting coherent control over consumers. Consider merely a few relevant questions. How does the editor and/or publisher of a particular title imagine for it ideological coherence? Is this necessarily achieved or only momentarily secured and constantly struggled over? How does such convoluted agency square with forms of critical theory in which The Culture Industry is the preferred originator of cultural meaning? The discussion which follows, limited as it is, makes the point that a critic needs to move sensitively

(that old-fashioned critical criterion) amongst a range of complexly interanimated positions and contexts if anything approximating a valuable assessment of women's magazine material is to be arrived at.

Categorising South African Women's Titles: Femaleness Under Construction

Under the umbrella of 'consumer magazine', the categories used by South African media professionals to map the local women's magazine market are: *English Market Niche – *Fair Lady* and *Femina*; *Black Market Niche – *True Love* and *Thandi* (a widely-used Zulu female name derived from the word for 'love'). Moving from niche markets to so-called special interest titles, we find that *Cosmopolitan* is described, along with *Elle* and *Marie Claire*, as female special interest: beauty and fashion. This might seem simple enough. But a little scrutiny makes evident the awkwardness of the designations, their instability rather than assumed objectivity. This might prod a researcher towards theorising women's magazines as texts which are paradoxically both repressive and liberatory, rather than merely constraining. The industry 'descriptions' may have implications for advertising – advertisements targeting women might be placed across all seven female titles – but the consequences for editorial are less easy to ascertain. Consider the uneven use of language and race as definitional criteria, for instance: *True Love* and *Thandi* may well be directed at a mainly black South African female readership, but they are published only in English, so they might sit more comfortably with *Fair Lady* and *Femina* than in some separate category nominated 'black market niche'. Further, in relation to a range of magazines aimed at the female reader, 'special interest' may be less accurate as a marker of a specific sub-genre of the women's magazine market than as a generic adjective: all women's magazines could be said to assume that women take a special interest in what it means to be female. Claasen reminds us, for example, that an

important development in South Africa during the early years of the twentieth century was the establishment of specialist magazines in the agricultural field...[such as *Die Boer* – The Farmer, *The Farmer's Weekly* and *Landbouweekblad* – Agricultural Weekly]. From the outset all these publications also had specialist sections for women, a fact which paved the way for the appearance of specialist women's magazines later on. (1993:107)

The point, here, is that South African women's magazines have their origins in areas of experience and interests that were differentiated from those conventionally attributed to men, and that all women's titles, by implication, attribute to women specialist forms of female knowledge. *Cosmopolitan*, to take but one example, is categorised as a fashion and beauty special interest title but it seems equally-often to be conceptualised among media professionals as an English market 'woman's magazine' niche title along the lines of *Fair Lady* and *Femina*. I would venture that readers, anyway, do not habitually make the kinds of nice distinctions between categories which profile readers for advertisers: and even advertisers cross the niche and special interest distinctions, looking to buy space so as to maximise audience reach in a genre which is assumed to narrate 'femaleness'. The constructing of categories attests to the discursive instability of the genre 'women's magazine' as it is conceived by media professionals: theirs are attempts to popularise and replicate difference alongside imagined female continuities.

As I have said, my comments in this Chapter are based primarily on my familiarity with those titles that are designated 'market leaders' in the range of titles published for South African English-speaking women. The pre-eminent title in terms of *circulation figures* among South African women's magazines is the Afrikaans *Sarie* (a popular, traditional, Afrikaans girl's name). But this may bear upon the fact that *Sarie* is one of only two women's magazine titles published for this niche market – the other is *Rooi Rose* (Red Roses). There are far more titles published for English-speaking South African women, resulting in a more divided potential audience. In terms

of advertising revenue, though, both *Cosmopolitan* and *Fair Lady*, despite their lower cover sales, have significantly higher incomes than *Sarie*. This may relate to the perceived spending power – perhaps even the envisaged *independent* spending power – of the women who form the implied readerships of these magazines.

How are the titles from which I draw my examples flagged in the industry? *Femina* is claimed to be “the first choice of a young married woman with a good job or young women who want to be married” (Jane Raphaely, editor and publisher of *Femina* in a letter in *MagFocus* September/October 1996:2); it is a magazine for “thinking, questioning women” which tackles “controversial, hard-hitting women’s issues with success” (Kingham 1995a:14). *Cosmopolitan*, widely perceived to be targeted at slightly “younger women,...aims to hold a mirror to society, as well as to share optimistic views of life and street-wisdom, suggesting why it is possible for women to succeed” (Kingham 1995a:14). The *Cosmopolitan* reader tends to be youthful, probably single, working, and very fashion conscious. *Fair Lady*’s recent advertising campaign (flighted in *MagFocus* and intended to educate potential advertisers into an awareness of the title’s repositioning in the market), proposes that the magazine answers “the needs of a new age, both social and psychological, and provides solutions to women at a time when careers and/or marriages are being built, and a certain maturity and balance become evident”. The “magazine’s dynamic new format and editorial style appeals to 25-35 year old English-speaking women” (Inside back cover, *MagFocus* September/October and November/December 1996). As Bierbaum sees it, *Fair Lady* and *Femina* “continue to battle it out to be the medium of choice for the slightly older – probably married with children – thinking woman who is still fashion conscious and enjoys entertaining” (1995:61). *True Love*, the leading ‘black’ female title, is aimed at the ‘sophisticated’, upwardly-mobile young black woman, but is curious in being reputed to have as many ‘non-sophisticated’ female readers (Bierbaum 1995). I can but assume, here, that ‘non-sophisticated’ denotes readers who do not fulfil all of the magazine’s profile criteria, such as employed, at least B/C income, urban, and fluent in English, but who nevertheless endorse aspects of the aspirational, modern femininity which the title represents as being a valid and attractive possibility for black women. Barbara Ross, research manager of National Magazines, points out that “the editorial is being increasingly positioned towards up-market, trend-setting black working women” (Cited in Bierbaum 1995:61).

Comments such as these, gleaned from practitioners in the trade, reveal not simply the agreed-upon categories and factual sub-generic markers that might be said to define the South African women’s magazine market, but difficult and contested attempts to produce and naturalise the readerships which might facilitate, and justify, the proliferation of similar but different women’s magazine titles. As Celia Lury and Alan Warde might point out, the quasi-scientifically descriptive language is indicative of an anxiety rather than an Authority (1997). It is more an article of faith than a fact: an uneasy attempt to produce knowledge of, and hence rhetorically to manage, a welter of women readers who repeatedly elude, rather than simply submit to, official definition. As I illustrate in this Chapter, such semiotic instability has significant consequences for the ways in which women’s magazines might be envisaged by the contemporary academic researcher.

It has also been useful to work with classifications of women’s magazines generated by experts not within the media profession but by academics. Let me discuss the categories provided by Hermes (1995). Part of her project is to consider the degrees of *correspondence* amongst several types of women’s magazines, but in order to manage her material she also divides women’s magazines into three categories devised in conversation with her interviewees. In other words, she seeks not to impose on readers an inappropriate and pseudo-objective intellectual

rationale but, as far as possible, to coax from readers of women's magazines an organic and hence 'authentic' conceptual structure that is germane to their own experience. This is an admirable but not altogether productive practice. In a position analogous to that of the market researcher and media professional, the intellectual finds herself having to produce a convincingly coherent body of knowledge about a genre and an audience that evade panoptic classification.

Hermes's classifications are gossip magazines, feminist magazines, and traditional women's magazines, the last-named "being either moderately-priced domestic weeklies or high-priced monthlies, often called 'glossies' because of the expensive paper they are printed on" (1995:6). Loosely cognate South African women's magazines would probably be *You* or *Hello* (gossip), *Agenda* or *Speak* (feminist), and *Femina* or *Essentials* (traditional). Even here, however, the archival impulse is eclipsed by a proliferation of 'research data', and individual titles may cross the classifications that are fundamental to the researcher's project: *Femina*, as an instance of what Hermes and her respondents would more than likely categorise as a 'traditional' women's magazine, regularly profiles gossip-influenced articles on film stars and personalities, as well as offering the kind of critically-investigative slant on environmental, health and other issues which might be regarded as more typical of the feminist journal. Similarly, *Fair Lady*, once regarded as perhaps the most traditional of the leading South African English women's titles (having survived the interlude of Dene Smuts's editorship), is currently seeking to re-present itself as a trailblazer at the forefront of advances in information technology. It is advertised as being "the first South African women's magazine on the World Wide Web" and "the only magazine in the country running reader opinion polls using voice mail" (Advertisement, *MagFocus*: July/August 1996:35). Such information may guide potential advertisers, but it also structures an associational and ideational realm in terms of which women can begin to imagine themselves as readers of a particular kind of women's magazine that consciously defines itself in relation to what might more typically be considered 'the traditional'. Such points substantiate my arguments for the possibility of reading women's magazines as forms which both allow for and even actively encourage contemporary femaleness as *debate* rather than merely passive subjugation. In an unpublished interview which I conducted in 1994 with Jane Raphaely, who has been involved in the editing and publishing of several South African women's magazines, she argues that *Fair Lady* has forfeited many of the advances and innovations introduced under her guidance, becoming a bland, unadventurous magazine which readers buy more for the double crossword bonanza than for interesting editorial and content. I am not certain of the weight to grant Raphaely's claim. On the one hand, as I have been explaining, the title has updated both its editorial mix and graphic format in response to pressure from the marketing department and readers, and on the other I am familiar with many women who relish the leisure afforded by the very crosswords that Raphaely dismisses! If the 'look' of *Fair Lady* has only gradually changed to encompass international innovations in print design – and, indeed, if one might wish that reader loyalty and brand image were not so strongly defined as to preclude a change in the all-too-connotative masthead – one cannot deny that there are significant differences in the magazine's preferred modes of address since its inception. The first issue had a cover which, despite an editorial environment influenced by liberal feminism, featured a back view of a young white girl in frilly bloomers trying on a flowery hat and standing on tip-toe in order to peer into a mirror. Over the years, readers have in the letters page voiced their opinions about the form and content of the magazine, and have especially taken issue with the slogan which appears along the spine of each issue. Originally, this read "The Woman You Want to Be", but it has several times been amended in keeping with readers' objections. Permutations have been: "The Woman You Are", to "For All the Woman You Are", to the present "For Women Who Want to Know". (It seems

unnecessary to elaborate on the fairly obvious connotations of each of these slogans in relation to a changing conception of female audience.)

Shifting Readership Patterns

In working with generic similarity in relation to individual titles, with the women's magazine as both constancy and change, I have also had to recognise the unstable, uncertain quality of the South African magazine audience in the mid-to-late-1990s context: media analysts are themselves unsure about who is reading what, and how the data contained in All Media Products Surveys (AMPS) and Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC) tables may be interpreted. Lyndall Campher, group media director of the advertising firm Hunt Lascaris, points out that the 1996 AMPS indicate that the monthly, upmarket glossies such as *Femina* and *Cosmopolitan* "are likely to have a higher level of peripheral readers than weeklies": "*Femina*'s loyal readers constitute only 35% of total readership", while only a third of *Cosmopolitan*'s readers read every issue (1996:5). Interestingly, too, it is claimed that while readership levels have increased in so-called African general interest titles (magazines like *Drum*, and *Bona*), during the past year from 21,4% to 25,8%, loyalty of readership "has declined in most African magazines, but increased in *Cosmopolitan*, *Woman's Value* and other traditional white magazines" (Campher 1996:5). Both black and white South African women readers of monthly women's magazines, then, seem to comprise a vacillating market, but one still interested in the kinds of magazines which have conventionally constituted the women's magazine genre. Does this announce their puerile dependence and continuing thralldom? Does it declare their selective and creative use of an ambiguous genre? I am not sure, but Campher's observations make it perhaps even more pertinent than usual to attempt to chart not only the intended editorial differences between magazine titles, but the ways in which titles rework elements of 'the women's magazine' as a genre and the ways in which readers perceive themselves to be situated in relation to this recirculation. Although they are themselves no scientific authority, the rudimentary data which I cite above suggest to me (and to other media analysts, if reports in *MagFocus* are reliable) that women's magazine readers are not easily characterised as 'brand loyal'. They do not regularly read every issue of any title, and have a tendency to shift amongst titles. In other words, editors should not assume that contemporary South African women envisage for themselves what has traditionally been cast as a "personal relationship based on shared values" with an individual title and its "unique personality" (Kingham 1995a:14). Nor, however, need they proceed to cast this volatility in the registers of indiscriminate sexual activity. I was surprised to discover that media professionals tend to use the expression 'promiscuous' to describe those readers (of whatever gender, race or class) who vacillate amongst titles, and who must be 'wooed' into a monogamous relationship with a particular brand. Imagine my surprise when reading, too, that it is the editor of any title who is primarily responsible for the wooing (Kingham 1995a:14). How does one reconcile this trope with the experiential and ideological boundaries which have tended to shape South African magazines? (Let me leave aside the recent South African past in which 'mixed marriages' and 'interracial' relationships were legally prohibited.) Consider the trope of wooing in relation to women's magazines. On the one hand, it euphemistically connotes the (preferably formalised) monogamy which all current South African titles endorse in an age of AIDS, and it relies on the romantic register that for many critics is the staple of the women's periodical press. Yet given what is usually the femaleness of women's magazine editors and primary readerships, the implied lesbian figure can hardly be considered merely conventional. It is awkward; even unwittingly transgressive. It points me to gaps and inconsistencies in society's willingness to imagine shared female experience. My response to the tropes of promiscuity and courtship is not outrage at

semiotic repression. Instead, I am inclined to reiterate that the discourses through which women's magazines are constructed are rife with contradiction, and that this instability may usefully allow readers to make meanings in the interstices of ideology.³

The Launch of New Titles

As in the case of work on women's magazines by Ballaster *et al* (1991), mine has been carried out in a context which saw the launch of several new women's magazine titles. (The fact that their research has a more historical-genealogical slant than my own, and occurred in relation to the British scene, does not absolutely invalidate my comparison.) As this Chapter indicates, while the South African periodical press since the late-1980s has not been characterised by quite the proliferation of new titles which emerged in Britain during the latter half of the 1980s, there have been more launches than ever before, and several reconceptualisations: *Elle* and *Marie Claire* are the newcomers, while *Femina*, *Fair Lady*, *True Love* and *Cosmopolitan* have all been recast in keeping with international design trends and changing readership profiles. Overall, the growing number of women's magazines could well be said to prompt questions concerning the formulae and themes which are constitutive of the women's magazine as a form. To what extent can new women's magazines transform the genre while their centre lies in "the endeavour to give content and value to the femininity they market" (Ballaster *et al* 1991:127)? And to what extent might it be necessary, relative stasis notwithstanding, to consider how even repeated categories of content and form can be invested with pertinence?

An unusual angle on this question is offered by a quick look at the men's magazine.⁴ What has frequently been derogated as 'the women's magazine formula' (both in terms of form and content) is being redeployed in the design of burgeoning *men's* titles. We might ask, then, how men's titles both re-energise conventionally female categories and attempt to affirm the masculine as different from the female. How is the male title different from the women's text in matters of emphasis? Is more attention more consistently given to topics such as cars, computers, and adventure, and are conventional gender norms given a comforting nod in labels such as 'grooming' and 'health', which designate male attention to the physical body as anything but 'beauty'? Yet is there not also in the men's titles prolific use of familiar 'female' codes: style, fashion, letters, and personalised address, as well as photographic images which invite men to gaze at men. As in the case of women's magazines, then, it could be argued that titles like *Men's Health* and *Directions* are engaged in awkwardly negotiating subjectivity. Editors, indeed, argue that this kind of male magazine is gaining ground because men, just as much as women, have begun to admit (in private and in the simulated privacy of the magazine pages) to having emotional and relationship problems which need solving. And because men, just as much as women, want to know about keeping their faces and bodies in shape. As Suzanne Moore expresses it, young men *ought* to have greater access to the kind of sexual and emotional information which regularly appears in the pages of women's titles and is studied "with...intensity" by girls: "boys remain shockingly ignorant....If knowledge is power, then this is yet another area in which boys are losing out" (1996:7). Comments such as these prompt me to suggest that men's magazines, like women's titles, have an important social role. Further, the kinds of rhetorical questions which I have posed above could lead us to acknowledge that as in the case of femaleness, consensus concerning 'the masculine' is not easily achieved; its meanings are unstable, and erratically representative of any number of interests rather than of Capital or something ominously designated The Dominant Male Ideology. Contemporary men's magazines could be said to illustrate that masculinity is struggled over, inconsistent; now conformist, now transgressive; now claiming authority, now explicitly inviting debate and reply.

Such issues can productively be applied to women's titles. The most recent women's magazine on the South African market is a local version of *Marie Claire*, launched in mid-1997 by Perskor, a subsidiary of Republican Press. (Editions already appear in 26 countries, including Korea, Britain, Australia, Italy, the USA, Brazil, China, Japan and Mexico.) Editor of the South African issue, Pnina Fenster, an award-winning local journalist, perceives the title's distinctiveness to lie in its editorial strategy: "broad-minded attitude, elegance, and realistic approach to women's lives", a version of the "sensationalism with style" (*MagFocus* January/February 1997:3) for which the original French title is known. The ways in which this endeavour to generate brand identity and reader loyalty will involve the reworking of categories such as female, feminine, and feminist remains to be seen over the long term. Despite seeking a house content and style for *Marie Claire*, for instance, Fenster allows that there is increasing volatility in the local women's magazine market, such that 'the women's magazine' manifests itself as what Hermes calls a "blurred genre" (1995:6) that has as much to do with attitude as with empirical facts like income and education. For instance, while the intended reader of *Marie Claire* is aged 22 to 38, 'down-ageing' means that the readership is likely to comprise women of many actual ages. Editor Fenster (age unknown) herself maintains that "the old rules about age are outmoded...; 30, 40, 50 aren't what they once were". Similarly, she cites the importance of demographic shifts for women's magazines, "particularly in a country as changed and changeable as South Africa".⁵ *Marie Claire* is proposed as a 'specialist' title which focuses on fashion. Yet it has a letters page, several advice columns, and gives some attention to decor in conjunction with fashion and entertaining. In other words, the imagined distinction of the title needs also to be understood as intersecting with the continued currency, within both the print media professions and more informal, popular contexts, of a specialist 'niche' categorised as 'the woma/en's magazine'. *Marie Claire* carries the same advertisements for major beauty lines and fashion labels as most of the existing South African women's magazines (notwithstanding a trend beyond the women's magazine genre for agencies to design for a single product a series of individual adverts which appear in single magazine titles, mirroring the image of the magazine brand in question). One implication of placing the same ad across various women's magazines is a form of synergy: whatever the specific niche and editorial slant of any individual title, advertisers are sufficiently interested in accessing the growing spending power and aspirational fantasies of 'women' more generally to invest in a cross-categorised *female* readership who are understood to read the genre 'the women's magazine'. So there are degrees of constancy across the spectrum of women's magazines. It is this that makes them *women's* magazines. My point, however, is that we need not rush to assume the necessarily *negative* conservatism of repetition. Certainly, as I have indicated, the research of critics such as Ballaster *et al* (1991), and Winship (1987) implies that all women's magazine titles construct their identity in relation to a relatively formulaic construction of subject matter and tone. But they also admit odd similarities between even such historically, and ideologically divergent titles as *Woman's Own* and the British feminist journal *Spare Rib*. (I take this point further when discussing the South African journal *Speak* in relation to some glossy women's titles.)

Another newcomer to the South African market is *Elle*, launched in April 1996, and subsequently the recipient of international recognition with the IPD Gold Award for Best International Launch of 1996. *Elle* is positioned fundamentally as an upmarket fashion title, a special interest title rather than a broad-based general interest women's magazine. But there has also been an attempt to characterise *Elle* – as has occurred in the case of the similarly special interest fashion and beauty title *Cosmopolitan* – as being not exclusively about "an unmatched number of fashion pages", but as being "a 'fashionable' title" (Kinghorn 1995a:14). Assumptions

about employment, the urban, and financial fluency notwithstanding, none of the titles on which I focus, it might be said, is as “materially based” as the new foreign titles in the South African market, *Elle* and *Marie Claire*: “about 70 percent fashion content – and coming from a European environment of economic stability and security with which local women will not be able to identify” [editor of *Cosmopolitan*, qtd in Kinghorn 1995a:14]. Yet we should not misread this statement so as to cast an interest in international fashion as in itself undermining the meaningfulness, relevance and purpose of a South African woman’s magazine. Even *Elle*, with its 70% fashion content, has shown itself eager to broach issues which are probably of interest to a range of South African women. This ideological volatility is accentuated when one considers that a number of *Elle*’s fulltime staff have worked previously on other South African magazines and print media: Lianne Burton (initially Assistant Editor, Special Projects and now editor of *Elle Decor*), for instance, has been *Cosmopolitan*’s Johannesburg Bureau Chief, while Heather Robertson (Assistant Editor) was until recently Literary Editor of *Tribute* magazine, and also reporter on the alternative newspaper *South*. The point of all of this is that brand and individual identity necessarily work in shifting interrelationships: any brand image-cum-house style is made in part by the self-signatures of the individual journalists and other creative personnel, at the same time as the trademark style of an individual writer or photographer or layout artist might be shaped by the magazine’s brand image. Furthermore, the premises of *Cosmopolitan* and *Femina* in Cape Town contain a library which houses not only back issues of these magazines, but selected numbers of various local titles, and international editions of magazines like *Elle* and *Marie Claire* whose content and editorial stance are assumed to be relevant to women readers. All the staff are required to read other magazines, and to source ideas, copy, articles and images that could be refashioned and/or syndicated by *Cosmopolitan* or *Femina*. Individual titles, then, simultaneously withdraw from and deposit into a conceptual and visual ‘image bank’ which circulates ideas of the female: how narrow or extensive these ideas, how repeated yet re-invented, is matter for consideration. If such global circulation implies control and hegemony, recent media research by cultural anthropologists such as Ariun Appadurai (1991 and 1993) suggests that the user, working with discourse in the context of local knowledge, activates and realises meaning. If nothing else, the deal of cross-fertilisation occurring within the titles designated women’s magazines raises two uncomfortably associated points. Firstly, it suggests that it is risky to proceed as I have, imagining that certain titles have the edge on progressivity, the contemporary and narratives of liberated femaleness preferred by critics. (I pursue this later in the Chapter, when addressing the educative and everyday repertoires in relation to which women might make sense of women’s magazines.) At the same time, this cross-fertilisation might prompt the researcher to pay more sympathetic attention to the psychic reservoir of ‘female’ meaning that women repeatedly re(turn) to in using women’s magazines. Instead of dismissing the recurrent tropes, figures, images and ideas as trite and/or insidious, we might more willingly explore their purchase on women’s imaginations. (I return to this when I discuss women’s magazines and ‘everyday life’.)

Advertising, Race and Gender

In attempting to theorise constancy and change, similarity and difference as ambiguous signifiers rather than as indices of female co-optation in South African woman’s magazines, it is also important to address the functioning of race and gender in the ads carried by women’s magazines. Besides categories like ‘special interest’ and ‘family’, the local print media market has historically been conceived of as catering to different race groups, broadly delineated black and white. These

divisions still pertain, with a number of magazines for a black readership being published in English and in several of the indigenous languages.

An interesting phenomenon in the current South African context, though, is what for lack of a better term I call cross-categorised advertising: the placing of the same advertisements in various categories of magazines, whatever the imagined racial grouping of the target audience. This differs markedly from the model of print advertising which dominated during apartheid, when very often *two* versions of an advertisement were created for magazines with racially-different audiences, one using black models and locations associated with 'the black community', the other using white models and associated locations. (Here, I do not refer specifically to gender because this was a method applied beyond the pages of women's magazines.) Today, however, a magazine like *True Love* is as likely as *Cosmopolitan*, *Fair Lady*, *Femina* and *Elle* to carry ads (usually full-colour, double page spreads or even pull-outs, prominently placed just inside the front cover in order to borrow from the aura of the cover image) featuring Cindy Crawford for Revlon, or Elisabeth Hurley for Estée Lauder. And this group of women's magazines is as likely as the black women's niche title *True Love* to feature Naomi Campbell in Gossard's current advertisement for sexy, yet comfortably-structured women's underwear. The *race* of the models, here, is not intended to be the primary signifier of identity, probably on account of their assumed global visibility as super-icons who front major fashion or beauty houses. Instead, race is downplayed in favour of such things as a female currency, elicited variously through beauty, glamour, style, fashion or a general contemporary 'suss'. (A number of trans-categorising women's magazine advertisements feature not models *per se*, but model the product – Calvin Klein fashions, Bally shoes, or Gold Cross pens – in which case the product signifies successful, stylish femininity.) The advertisement which crosses the racial categorises through which South African women's magazines have historically been conceptualised is a not inconsequential indication of shifts in the South African women's magazine market. Both empirically and imaginatively, spaces are being created in which women of various races and cultures are encouraged to imagine themselves as part of a potential female collectivity premised on an informed consumption. Within the traditionally divided South African context, in particular, this might mean that black women are tentatively being recognised as active *makers* of categories like beauty and style which have long been imagined as primarily white.

Yet to put this rather differently, if cross-categorisation illustrates change, it also highlights several continuing characteristics of the South African women's magazine market. Indeed, some cultural commentators might query the extent to which black women are being encouraged to consider themselves as legitimate, assimilated partakers in what remains fundamentally a white, or at any rate western, female culture. The traditionally white *Cosmopolitan*, *Femina* and *Fair Lady* now have approximately 30 to 40% black readerships, and often attempt to reshape race into a more general South African multiculturalism. Judging from Ballaster *et al*'s comments on British magazines, they would probably dismiss these shifts as facile assimilation or the showcasing of 'other' races as a cultural exotic. The matter is difficult, and as in my discussion of identity and *Tribute*, perhaps we might start asking questions about the extent to which a variety of South African women readers are likely to recognise 'themselves' in the pages of particular woman's magazines: not only as individuals but as individuals who are affiliated in diverse, often less than obvious ways, both to and across, cultures, races, classes....

There continue, for example, to be cultural and racial distinctions informing the commerce of South African women's magazines. Unless it has escaped me, *Cosmopolitan*, *Fair Lady*, and *Femina* (as well as *Elle* and *Marie Claire*) do not feature the ads run in *True Love* or *Thandi* for Black Like Me cosmetics, say, or Sof'n Free hairstyling products. As Bierbaum remarks, "*Fair*

Lady, Femina and *Cosmopolitan* have managed to create a finely-balanced, multiracial feel, which makes them appealing for both aspirant and successful black women while keeping their white readership. But the question arises whether any of these titles would carry an ad for, say, black hair care products. A glut of such products might affect perceptions and could drive away white readers" (1995:61). Moreover, research has shown that the particular cover of an issue may influence the stand appeal of the title, hence the regularity with which many women's magazine covers feature popular contemporary personalities, film and television stars, and supermodels, often alternating with 'model' faces which, while believed to embody the image of the magazine, are not immediately recognisable as celebrities by an extended public. Farquar's objection is that "while local white women's magazines have come a long way in multi-cultural coverage, there is still a tendency to cover only high profile black people rather than the issues, and to do so from the perspective of 'the other'" (1997a:8). Is it really feasible, though, to cite this as a failure of racial progressivity? There are likely to be complicated reasons for the use or otherwise of famous individuals in even a black women's title. While *True Love* generally places a black female face on the cover, editor Dhlomo-Mkhize argues that "*True Love* steers away from featuring black models [my emphasis] on covers because the status of the model in South Africa is nowhere near as high-profile as internationally" (Farquar 1997a:8). This significantly qualifies decontextualised claims concerning the inappropriate perpetuation by South African women's magazines of the convention of the 'cover girl'. Thus when the ANC's Cheryl Carolus appears on the cover of *True Love*, for example, it is not simply a case of the politically consequent being reduced to the level of the banal. Instead, the researcher might speculate in nuanced ways about the extension of glamorised mass-media visibility and widespread popularity to the selves and ideas of figures who might otherwise remain but remotely prominent leaders in an abstract 'Government'. The codes of women's magazines, then, can be used to mediate the political into more accessible, popularised discourses – among which might be personality, intimacy, and a belief in the inspirational 'self'.

Let me return, though, to the matter of race. The persistence in South African print media of racially-distinct advertising campaigns (alongside instances of the cross-categorised advertisement) has its pragmatic defenders: this is not an essentialised racism, but a socio-economic reality. Dhlomo-Mkhize claims that if the historically poor quality of South Africa's black titles has compelled many "aspirational black people" to read across the traditionally white magazine market, it is not by definition racist "for a magazine to cater predominantly for the needs of one cultural group" since reader identity is a major component influencing a magazine's success" (Cited in Farquar 1997a:8). According to Barbara Ross of NatMags, although the "black women who read *Fair Lady* are getting information out of it that they do not find in other magazines,...they are not our core readership. By running black-oriented ads we wouldn't be giving the client the best in terms of reach and frequency...[it would be inappropriate to run] a Black Like Me type product in *Fair Lady*...because...the average reader does not fit the product's profile" (Cited in Bierbaum 1995:61). "What happens when they do?" asks Bierbaum. "It all depends very much on the extent to which white women are willing to overcome their prejudices and share their magazine" (1995:61).

What one might want to ask, I suppose, is whether this extends from advertising to editorial. In other words, are the preferred ideologies of femininity circulated in the editorial pages of *True Love* and *Cosmopolitan*, say, racially constructed, or at least influenced? My response involves both affirmation and negation. As will increasingly become apparent in this Chapter, such a reply derives from a 'both and' argument which Radner (1995) considers fundamental to the very nature of women's magazine discourse, in which women are at once assumed to possess a

historically-specific cultural literacy, and are invited to imagine their identities in relation to a free-ranging 'style'. Accordingly, it seems a desirable model for the critic to use in struggling to theorise the texts and contexts associated with the world of women's magazines.

In some respects, then, my reply to the question must be yes. For instance, while all of the titles with which I deal at some point address the matter of women and maternity, *True Love* is the only one explicitly, and indeed regularly, to categorise this attention in its contents pages under the banner "Mother Love". This could be cited as an instance of the norms and expectations concerning a 'proper' black womanhood which regulate the form and content of any black women's magazine even if the editorial steps outside of sanctioned behavioural patterns. Moreover, the magazine is imagined positively to represent black women's interests, in part by re-presenting to black women images and experiences which are recognisably 'from their lives' as black South African women. The racial slant, here, is intended to be valuable, rather than a reinforcing of apartheid-derived inferiority and separatism.

But in some respects I would have to reply no. For instance, a contentious case may be made for *Cosmopolitan's* use of race. Far from realising the progressive, completely 'colour unconscious' future that editor Jane Raphaely on several occasions in the late-1980s advocated for the title (she sometimes claimed this even as a feature of the magazine as it then existed), the present *Cosmopolitan* is *consciously not* race-free. This is a little confusing. I am not suggesting that the editorial environment is characterised by a lament for a lost, white racial purity, but that in a South Africa of the late-1990s it is more self-conscious about race than ever before. Given the visual and verbal mix 'apparent' in any issue, the energies of the various editors and deputies (chief, managing, art, picture, promotions, features, fashion, food, decor...) seem deliberately to have been put to work so as to deconstruct racial boundaries by featuring images, ideas and stories that show femaleness (and often 'humanity' more broadly) in a number of different national, cultural and ethnic contexts. This 'multicultural' mix is hardly coherent or constant, but it is in evidence and is compounded by the move in advertising towards images that represent cultural diversity. As critics of 'multiculturalism' in the curriculum have pointed out (Goldberg 1994), such tactics entail a clever re-casting of race which tends to leave larger cultural structures intact, and some are inclined to consider it a negative effect of the colonial cosmopolitan impulse which refuses to acknowledge the boundaries and integrity of legitimately Other cultures and instead rapaciously claims right of access to anything it desires. Susan Willis is scathing in her dismissal of North American *Elle's* increasing use of A Woman who is "all races in one", since her "features, skin tone, and hair suggest no one race, or even the fusion of social contraries" (1990:185). As she continues, the

use of beige fashion models is the industry's metaphor for the magical erasure of race in our society. It underscores white supremacy without directly invoking the dominant race....Such a look denies the possibility for articulating cultural diversity precisely because it demonstrates that difference is only a matter of fashion. It is the new fall colours, the latest style, and the corporate logo or label – a discrete emblematic representation of the otherwise invisible white corporate godfather. (1990:185)

I am suggesting, though, that a contemporary South African women's magazine like *Cosmopolitan* does not pretend to effect miraculous transformations of reality by smoothing difference and even disagreement into homogeneity. Instead, many women's magazines acknowledge race as an issue to be struggled over even as they point to idealised human spaces in which racial categorisations will not determine worth. Despite severe criticisms having been made of women's magazines' handling of race in both the local South African and the international contexts, then, it seems reasonable to consider the 'multicultural' imperative in magazine content as one way of addressing a variety of women's needs for images of themselves, and of 'others'. Paradoxically, the endeavour to render *Cosmopolitan* multicultural probably sees

those responsible for producing the title having not only to work against, but creatively *with* the very eugenicist racial categories generated by the architects of apartheid – this despite the fact that a new social order now requires that these be deconstructed. When booking a model, glancing over photo trannies, planning a food shoot, profiling a personality, selecting individuals to feature in the achievers pages....: some of the questions in an editor's mind might well be "How does this fit the new brief of the title? How does it sit with the other images and ideas in the text? Do we have enough of a 'cultural spread' in this edition? Is there evidence of not only so-called white faces and opinions, but of so-called black people, so-called coloured people, so-called Indian people?" It is against these kinds of logistic and ideological difficulties, I think, that the trend towards what has been called the exotic (rather than the 'beige') look should be perceived. It is not a case of expediently seeking to cream blackness into *café au lait*, or to coax whiteness into skin tones of cappuccino. 'The exotic' answers a number of practical and principled needs in managing South Africa's shift from white control to what is in effect black majority rule: it facilitates the spectacularisation of both black and white people's naturalised quotidian. Increasingly, too, as South Africans of all races intermarry, the spectacularly exotic is likely to become the naturalised ordinary.

In some respects, then, the racial quotient remains evident in women's magazines, but it is being put to extremely unstable use. Returning to *True Love*, for example, I would have to point out that notwithstanding its black female readership, the magazine has recently been revamped into an up-market glossy that covers many of the same issues and topics as other South African women's magazines, in a package which is equally well laid out. It has subsequently enjoyed substantial increases in readership, and has attracted better advertising. All of this entails a tricky manipulation which relates not solely to race, but also to the local and the global. We need not only to interpret the re-design as a significant investment in the title, but to see that it gestures to complex points of intersection and difference between local and international knowledges. On the one hand, for instance, the improved paper stock and emphasis on stylish female lifestyles could be said to diminish the distinctions between *True Love* and other, often foreign women's periodicals. The magazine has adopted a style and content which re-duplicate the international standard of confident, aspirational, informed consumption. On the other hand, however, the new look of the magazine is a determined response precisely to the local: a refusal to be limited by a policy of underdevelopment devised under apartheid in which 'black' periodicals were characterised by poor quality paper, a cheap (and seldom syndicated) content directed at 'natives', and an insubstantial editorial contribution. As I have pointed out in relation to *Tribute*, such inferior print journalism was deemed to be good enough for a culturally, rhetorically and visually illiterate 'them'.

In ways other than those related to principles and policy, too, *True Love* magazine continues to address local specificity: features on African gospel music, on Cheryl Carolus's role in the ANC and in government, on reinventions of traditional African cooking, on local black radio stars, on a domestic worker who made it big in pay phones in the townships. This local content could be said to counteract what several black magazine editors have identified as the failure of foreign titles launched in South Africa adequately "to tailor themselves towards expressing local culture" (Farquar 1997a:8).⁶ As far as black South African women's magazines are concerned, Ramotena Mabote, former bureau chief of *Drum*, maintains that the "sophisticated and upwardly mobile black woman will continue to choose magazines that address her identity within her own culture and...this will always be more attractive than any foreign perspective" (Farquar 1997a:8). Must I take this to mean that *True Love* or *Thandi* will always be preferred over *Cosmopolitan*, *Elle*, or *Marie Claire*? Despite the apparently clear oppositions which Mabote proposes between

'own' and 'foreign', the 'own culture' to which he refers is a notoriously changeable construct, and perhaps never more so than within contemporary South African realities. Even working within the context of Mabote's own comment, is 'own culture' synonymous with 'black culture'? A particular version of black South African ethnicity? A new South African national culture? I am uncertain. Given my reading of South African media and media analyses, I am much less confident about projecting future trends than is Mabote, since they are likely to be implicated not only in 'race' as a category of contemporary identity but in the vicissitudes of a demarcating authority we once confidently and securely called 'class'. As I have already argued in Chapter 1, if phrases such as 'sophisticated' and 'upwardly mobile' designate both *actual* spending power and the perceived *ideational* power of spending time and thought on 'style' and 'image', we cannot assume that a reader's 'own culture' will be diametrically opposite to any 'foreign perspective', whether the foreign is imagined as from Europe or as white European. The local and the global are, increasingly, repertoires of experience and understanding which exist in complex interrelationship. This is especially the case when they are released (or more painfully torn) from a master logic of race and inflected through contemporary South African cultural struggles with the 'multicultural', 'ethnicity', 'style' and 'the global'. Will black women, as a significant part of the women's magazine market of the future – the growing black 'middle class' – *all* locate their identities primarily in relation to an expressly *black* women's magazine? Will the traditionally white women's magazines manage, beyond mere assimilation or tokenism, to meet the challenge of imaging and imagining South African 'cultural diversity' so as to attract a new kind of readership? Whatever the criticisms which could be levelled against the white glossies in this regard, the fact is that even 'foreign' titles like *Cosmopolitan* have been immersed in the local long enough to have learnt a valuable lesson: the need to represent South African issues, personalities, people, perspectives and events in relation to international fashion, knowledge and media culture. Even the (rather coy) nude male festive package of December 1996 was made up of manne, boykies, bafana, local ouks. The display of their (South African nether) regionality was undoubtedly intended to signify at once the value of the home-grown and the ability of the local to mimic the styles and liberated values of the global cosmopolitan.⁷

The Figure of the Editor

I cannot delve very deeply into the constraints exercised by brand image over individual editorial signature. Nor can I provide an historical survey of the shifts of editorship that have occurred in local women's magazine publishing. But even in briefly addressing aspects of editorial management in the South African women's magazine market I hope to reinforce my point that critics might conceive of women's magazines not through a paradigm which privileges either dismissal or celebration but struggles to grant real legitimacy to a dynamic of constancy and change.

Let me initially suggest, despite what subsequently emerges in this Chapter as my reworking of the analogy, that the editorship of a women's magazine may usefully be theorised by borrowing from the conventions of literary authorship, since in relation to their respective textual contexts, both magazine editor and literary author are the pre-eminently visible generators of an imagined textual coherence. In the case of the women's magazine editor, she is envisaged in the trade to 'authorise' the discourses through which the specific magazine title is articulated, and a crucial aspect of this is her personality which, intersecting with the title's brand identity, helps to personalise the ephemeral, inconstant, and proliferating discourses which are the stuff of the magazine genre. The editor's is an especially significant identity given the heteroglossic, multiple authors who produce the title; an authorial excess and overload which may contribute

to the apparently *de-authored* quality of the magazine text. Thus the editorial figure is important not only structurally, within the political economy of magazine publishing, but semantically, in a genre which is likely to be experienced as a collection of disparate styles. (In many cases it is difficult to attribute authorship of the visual and verbal codes of the magazine text: advertisements, for instance, may at the most carry small-print acknowledgements of advertising agency – Hunt Lascaris, The Jupiter Drawing Room, Herdbuoys – but the micro-agencies of professionals such as the copy writer, account executive and media planner are submerged.) The editor, in effect, decision-making capacity aside, is also a rhetorical strategy for managing the endless knowledges and formal inconstancies of the genre: she represents the possibility of an idealised authorial control in a cultural form where the reader is not expected to process the text by constructing a composite authorial identity from individually-authored pieces of copy. For many readers, the assumption seems to be that the overall authority of the magazine's brand identity has already been established through the editor's knowledge of her target readership. Consider the number of letters appearing in women's magazines where editors are berated for including images and/or opinions which transgress what readers have come to expect is the Authorised Version of the magazine's identity.

Yet to acknowledge the figurative and actual function of the editor of a women's magazine does not demand that we follow Ferguson's line (1983). She goes so far as to argue that women's magazines are a secular cult at the head of which looms the female editor as icon of readers' worship. I grant the importance of the editor as a symbolic figure – readers might address 'the editor' in corresponding with the magazine and they might even on occasions prefer to stall their own decision-making by deferring to 'the editor' as the final arbiter on issues debated within the text. But I am sceptical of construing the women's magazine as a site in which the editor – or even her Big Brother, Capital – is *necessarily* conceived of by readers as The Authority. As in their engagements with literature, readers of women's magazines are surprisingly creative agents who reach beyond the declared agent in deriving textual meaning. As the letters pages indicate, readers repeatedly question the relation of editor to the meanings generated both in the magazine's pages and beyond these pages by readers themselves. They search out authorship in various parts of the text and in their own lives. They are curious, for example, about sources, origins and evidences which, while in the body of the text, are not, unlike The Editor, at its head. They edit the very meanings presented to them in the editorial of each issue of a magazine. To make such a case is not naively to situate readers beyond the reach of the brand identity represented in the figure of the editor, but it is to credit that the idiosyncratic and the personal reading of a magazine text may be experienced as suasive, meaningful forms of authorship. Readers are trained by experience in the unofficial discipline of women's magazines to glance at the credits which appear alongside the photographs in fashion and make-up spreads: who is the model, the photographer, the make-up artist, even the sponsor. Each reader makes – reads, writes, designs – her/his own meanings; becomes her/his own author and own editor. Thus the identity of a title, however graphically headed by the editor, depends on a reader's making graphic of many conflictual forms of meaning.

Jane Raphaely and South African Women's Magazines

In order to make clearer the unstable forms of power characteristic of women's magazine discourses I find myself needing to discuss Jane Raphaely, widely considered *the* most powerful force in South African women's magazines, and the MD of two publishing companies that produce women's and decor titles.⁸ Charting the rise of 'the Raphaely dynasty', Richard McNeill writes, only partly tongue-in-cheek

Just as the cars on our roads were once pre-Volkswagen (who remembers now the Buicks, Oldsmobiles and Hudson Hornets of yesteryear?) so there was a dim and distant past when women's magazines were once pre-Raphaelyite: complacent, unimaginative, home-bound and, in the case of the local product, poorly printed. (1996:23)

While my own comments must necessarily be articulated in a more academic register than McNeill's, it cannot be denied that Raphaely has been influential in South African women's magazine publishing. Her individual and expressly female version of a familiar narrative – her 'transformation' from 'Jane Mullins', British working class girl, to an entrepreneurial 'self-made woman' in the colonial outposts – has been interpreted by many as a popular allegory of women's ability to succeed in business.

Raphaely founded and was first editor of the Nasionale Pers (National Press) title *Fair Lady* in 1965, a magazine whose perceived mix of "glamour, careers, fashion and discreet sexuality" (McNeill 1996:23) was at the time inspirational to a white female South African readership whose primary magazine matter had been British women's weeklies with their emphasis on cooking, knitting and Home Counties suburban living.

The origin of *Fair Lady* lay in Naspers' wanting to create, for advertisers, a vehicle to reach English-speaking women equivalent to their existing Afrikaans title *Sarie*. Yet it is also the case that Raphaely shrewdly "anticipated, and more than matched, the dramatic changes in the worldwide women's publishing market that the exploding feminism of the sixties produced" (McNeill 1996:23). In other words, the magazine was not simply a *consumer* bible. Raphaely says

As for answering to advertisers. Well, yes, they do have some clout in that they are central to the publication possibilities of the magazine. But this does not mean that we 'answer' to them. Oh yes, they would be very satisfied if all your editorials merely espoused or promoted the value of their products, but we are willing to run into flack. Take the case of vaginal deodorants when I was editor of *Fair Lady*: I simply said no, this product is risky, studies suggest that it could feasibly lead to vaginal ulceration. And readers could possibly sue us, of course. And then there were the breast enlargement creams. Research suggested that if the creams contained enough hormones to lead to breast enlargement, they might well lead to cancer. Again we said no, and refused to carry the advertisements. They tried, for a while, to push the products, but we did not give in. There was also the issue of skin lighteners. (Murray: unpublished interview)

Fair Lady had a reputation and associated advertising clientele sufficient to carry the title despite Raphaely's having refused to place certain ads, but the ability of advertising to make or break a magazine should not be underestimated. Raphaely has said that she launched several other women's titles for Naspers – *Woman's World*, for instance, which had a circulation of over 100 000 yet failed because it did not attract advertisers' confidence (Murray: unpublished interview). All of this would seem simply to endorse the case against women's magazines as documents in the service of Capital rather than as texts which intersect obliquely and erratically with women's realities and desires. As I see it, however, the matter is a little more complex, a little less predictable, and bears upon the contested nature of meaning in and in relation to women's magazines.

Unravel for a moment the tangled construction of authority in the quotation from Raphaely. Raphaely is understandably eager to envisage her own editorial capacity as existing at some remove from economic expedience: as editor, she suggests that she both does and does not answer to advertisers; she is at once dependent and ideally independent. Moreover, the authority of the individual editor – the influence of the Jane Raphaely who "simply said no" – is at moments in her explanation displaced into the dissentient collective agency of a 'we' who "are willing to run into flack". In analogous ways, too, the present continuous tense of the latter extends into an implied future this composite female authority that exerts power even beyond Raphaely's own, now defunct, editorship. The female authority constructed here by Raphaely is represented as

being at once her own and that 'mandated' by many women. Yet boundaries between 'us' and 'readers' – and hence between our and their authority – are also inscribed in the comment. In the matter of advertising in relation to editorial ethics, Raphaely's justifications for refusing to carry ads for certain products are to a significant degree based on a combination of medical and legal caution, rather than on the belief (her own or that of *Fair Lady* staffers) that there are debatable assumptions informing the idea that women have particularly bad body odours, or that large breasts are socially more desirable. The discourses mobilised by Raphaely are ideologically porous rather than contained, and cannot preclude her making contradictory investments, as editor, in apparently divergent forces of economic control and women's agency through which her own function of editor is actually and figuratively mobilised.

In 1983, Raphaely left *Fair Lady* and formed Jane Raphaely & Associates, in 1984 entering into a partnership with Nasionale Tydskrifte (National Magazines) to launch and edit a South African version of Helen Gurley Brown's *Cosmopolitan*. *Cosmopolitan* was South Africa's first local version of an international title. Using a characteristically *Cosmopolitan* image – "the three-quarter or upper-body shot of the model instead of the usual close-up of the face" (McCracken 1993:98) – the first South African *Cosmopolitan* features a cover of Anneline Kriel, erstwhile Miss World, and (then) wife of hotel and casino magnate Sol Kerzner. The editorial explains that her

life is one of action and jet-set travel that's bound to stir envy – yet she remains disconcertingly friendly and open. She handles all the excitement with the same calm that James Bond displays after wrestling with a villain – and indeed her own life recently took on all the characteristics of a thriller bestseller. (March 1984:4)

The last remark refers to Kriel's role in the made-for-television Afrikaans spy thriller *Skoppensboer*, but also glosses the allure and excitement of her own life as wealthy model, actress and entrepreneur. Readers are informed in the editorial that 'Anneline' is on the cover because she is a "young woman in full bloom who radiates confidence and sexual magnetism" (March 1984:4).

Introducing the magazine into this country in the mid-1980s, the editors and publishers of *Cosmopolitan* were able to capitalise on the likelihood that a 'popular feminism' – or so-called 'women's liberation' – had percolated into the cultural unconscious. As Raphaely conceptualises it, South African *Cosmopolitan* was to be a magazine addressing a "younger female audience" which was "accustomed to regard as its right" the chance to have a career, an independent income, an interest in sex (Murray: unpublished interview). It would be a title prepared to take risks in both responding to, and bringing into being, a sense of 'the modern woman'. To this end, Raphaely's end-piece in the magazine, "PS", argues that an important part of the brand identity was to be sex- and health-advice columns. Where other magazines "use euphemisms or asterisks, we settle for candour" (May 1984:192). Business advice and career pages were also central to the formula. "*Cosmopolitan's* great strength" argues Raphaely, would be "its capacity to grapple with real-life problems, to come up with constructive *feasible* solutions" (May 1984:192). Yet readers might have wondered how the spectacular and spectacularly wealthy Anneline was to be reconciled with the real-life problems and feasible solutions cited as the magazine's feminist brief, and there is indeed multiple evidence that the claims made by Raphaely did not unproblematically succeed in marshalling the reader towards the 'progressive' reading of femaleness announced by the editor and publisher for the new title. In the case of the first cover, for instance, a reader objected to the use of Anneline as well as her pose, maintaining that both undermined Raphaely's earlier criticism, in her capacity as editor of *Fair Lady*, of women as objects. This reader's response appears in the letters page of the subsequent issue of *Cosmopolitan*

(May 1984:191), and cynics might insist that such a method of airing difference is merely a dissembling democracy through which women's magazines are represented to an audience as reasonably regulative cultural agents. There is truth in this argument. However, I am not completely persuaded that women experience even such rhetorical technologies as necessarily oppressive structures. This is a point I consider in more detail when discussing the *productive* forms of consumption in which readers of women's magazines might well engage.

Raphaely's entrepreneurial energies reached beyond the South African *Cosmopolitan* licence. In 1988, as a separate acquisition of Associated Magazines (a four-partner joint venture formed by Raphaely, her husband, Volker Kuhnel and Republican Press), she took on the revitalisation of the moribund *Femina* from Republican Magazines (Claasen 1993:117). First published in 1944 – one of what Claasen calls a flood of specialist magazines on the South African market towards and after the end of the Second World War (1993:107) – *Femina* is South Africa's longest-standing magazine specifically for English-speaking women, and has undergone several repositionings. In 1969 it became *Darling*, in which incarnation it was a familiar marker of my generation's young white womanhood, containing what I now read as a dated collection of Jean Shrimpton-, Twiggy-, and occasionally Marsha Mason-look alikes, innumerable beauty and fashion features (panda-eyes, blue shadow, shimmer blush, lipgloss, cloche hats, hipsters, skinny-rib tanks). But *Darling* also featured the inimitable "Darling Blossom" a regular column written by the now-well-known South African novelist Jenny Hobbs. "Darling Blossom" used an irreverently humorous, distinctively 'Sowfrikkin' English idiom, rather than Standard Received English, in order to convey the female trials and tribulations of the young woman Blossom Broadbeam, who was struggling to define her independent identity in relation to her middle- to lower-class suburban family, friends and employer. Recollecting my readings of these columns, I remain uncertain about how to characterise my response: at times it was mockery and arrogant self-differentiation (are *those* people really that basic?); at times anxiety and reluctant identification (can *we* possibly look like this to observers?); and at times pleasurable recognition (oh yes, that's it exactly). The gendered South Africanness conjured in the "Darling Blossom" columns is something I remember as an unstable entity. Blossom and her 'pels' now confirm stereotypes, and now ridicule them. And I recall having wondered how this intersected with what I considered to be the patronising homogeneity and curiously upper-middle class *British* idiom of the title. Who was calling whom 'Darling'? And did this semantically polite version of the far more familiar, crass South Africanism 'doll', prompt readers to consider the magazine comparatively sophisticated? I bought *Darling* out of pocket money, variously enjoyed and was disappointed by the contents, but did not 'really' hear myself addressed from the corner store magazine-stand by the implicit whistles and whispered seductions of the title. The return to the original title, *Femina*, in the late-1970s allowed the publishers to trade in a far more suggestive complex of associational meanings: from feminine, to female, to feminist.

When Raphaely and Associated Magazines acquired *Femina* in 1988, they undertook to design and market "a top woman's journal" positioned "firmly between *Cosmopolitan* and *Fair Lady*, to reach women of substance who do not see themselves solely as career women or homebodies" (Raphaely in an advertorial in the *Sunday Times* April 30 1989:6). In an attempt to advertise brand identity, *Femina*'s readership was presented as comprising women of substance both with regard to spending power and cultural-political clout-cum-concern: our content "reflects the interests of a well-read and well-educated woman with money to spend". It "ranges from new role models to searching, controversial investigative features" (Raphaely in an advertorial, 1989:6). *Femina* is an especially spectacular re-invention of a local women's title,⁹ having been repackaged in order to draw a closely-defined target readership whom Jane Raphaely has

described as “educated and sophisticated...as well as being top shoppers....Their custom has built local labels...into booming brands. Their concern and compassion show in commitment to community causes and consumer issues, and politically they are a force to be reckoned with”. Of course, this quotation is from an advertorial, devised for the launch and marketing of the ‘New Look’ *Femina*. So Raphaely is as much ‘conjuring’ an audience as she is describing an already existing market. The readers are being educated into the kind of femaleness that the magazine title would find most profitable and most ideologically endorsable, in a South Africa of the time. Thus while the *Femina* and *Cosmopolitan* women are designated ‘women of substance’, there emerges a patronising attitude to *Fair Lady*, a title not in Raphaely’s stable and no longer under her editorship. Such differentiations point to the need by magazine publishers to generate a market through rhetoric; to encourage women to view themselves as particular kinds of readers. As I am arguing in this Chapter, however, such instruction is never fully secured (and as I have already indicated, readerships of women’s magazines are highly unstable).

Let me focus on another aspect of the advertorial in which Raphaely attempts to give readers a purchase on the positive version of femaleness that *Femina* will purportedly place in circulation. I am referring to what is overtly flagged as an advertisement within the page-space of the *Sunday Times* advertorial proper. This ad is styled, as is Raphaely’s comment, to resemble the reportage of newspaper journalism. It advertises the Carole Charlewood interview, which was to become a prominent component of the regular *Femina* mix. Charlewood was probably well-known by educated, middle class white women for her investigative sociopolitical journalism, and she might have found a sympathetic audience among many of the women likely to fall within the proposed *Femina* audience. She is certainly positioned, in the advertorial, as a cultural-ideological ‘lure’. But Jane Raphaely’s attempt to signify Charlewood’s status as remarkable woman might have struck the more informed among the magazines informed readership as unfortunate. “As it is,” claims Jane Raphaely in the advertisement, “we already carry more features and in greater depth than most other local magazines”. She then moves to endorse the Charlewood interview through analogy: “But having Carole write for us is, in journalistic terms, the equivalent of having Margaret Thatcher lead your party” (*Sunday Times* 30 April 1989:6). Even readers who *did* imagine themselves to be what Raphaely in the same advertorial nominates a female “force to be reckoned with” might have taken issue with this comparison. If I saw myself as in some respects fitting the magazine’s brief, I was sceptical of Raphaely’s purposeful attempt to promote the title through what I considered to be a contemptuously doctrinaire, aggressively nationalistic version of the ‘female role model’. Despite being made in the extensive and ostensibly authoritative space of the advertorial, then, Raphaely’s claims cannot be thought to have secured consent. They do not, merely through their existence, prove that the ‘New Look’ *Femina* could fashion a guaranteed, consensual femaleness that could unproblematically deliver to advertisers a body of desirable female consumers.

Cosmopolitan and Vanessa Raphaely

Struggles over the meanings ascribed to South African femaleness in the business of women’s magazines are also evident in the passing of *Cosmopolitan*’s editorship from Jane Raphaely to her second daughter, Vanessa Raphaely, in January 1996. (The youngest daughter, Julia, was already working for the magazine in marketing, and is now with *Femina* in a management capacity.) This was the most talked-about editorial shift within South African women’s magazine publishing in the early 1990s. *Cosmopolitan* had been planning a change of editor since 1994, the magazine’s 10 year celebration, but no appropriate person, it was said, could be found. Raphaely senior, ever the astute media manager, seems to have perceived The Decade as an ideal

imaginative marker: ten years after the launch of South African *Cosmo* was not simply a logical point at which to initiate change, but one at which readers could be encouraged to conceptualise change positively. This was especially the case since '1994' had the added-value of 'New South African' associations, and indeed a feature in the special ten-year issue claimed that *Cosmopolitan* was proud to have been favoured reading among political prisoners on Robben Island.

It is hardly startling that speculations of nepotism surrounded Vanessa Raphaely's appointment in 1996: Raphaely was a long-standing, publicly visible media identity. Iconoclastic Radio 702 talkshow host John Robbie is alleged to have asked, on air, "What do they do in Cape Town, breed Raphaelys?" Yet the second Raphaely daughter had spent 10 years in London working on British magazines, including British *Cosmopolitan*, *Cosmopolitan's* separate health and beauty title *Zest*, *Company*, *You* magazine, the style section of the *Mail on Sunday* magazine, and the *Sunday Express* magazine (McNeill 1996:23). Her credentials and experience, then, were not unsuited to the *Cosmopolitan* brand. My purpose is not to treat Vanessa Raphaely as new-age guru, but to point to the perplexing realignments and reassertions of discourses that occur 'in' *Cosmopolitan* when those responsible for its economic and conceptual production labour to negotiate its contemporary space. Within my larger attempt to develop an appropriate method of critical response to local women's magazines, then, this section of the Chapter tries in small, unheroic ways to rework the critical penchant to read 'the women's magazine' as generically and ideologically systematic by posing questions, as Morris does in her piece on shopping centres, "about a semiotics of the management of change" (1993a:297).

Under Vanessa Raphaely's editorship, *Cosmopolitan* remains recognisable on the newsstand on account of its familiar masthead, photo angle, high quality (very glossy) cover paper, bold cover graphics and stories: the December 1996 issue, for instance, reworked a number of *Cosmo* favourites, including an outspoken declaration of women's interest in the naked male body which marked the magazine's first appearance in the USA in the 1970s, and which has continued since then to be a flourishing signature of the title. But the transfer of editorship from mother to daughter has also entailed noteworthy reconceptualisations of editorial tone and style, and if *Cosmopolitan's* audience has conventionally spanned the 18-35 age group, the editorial transfer should probably be cast as a shift from older to younger end of the women's magazine market. This is interesting in relation to the discursive construction of femaleness. According to media analyst Kinghorn, in her capacity as editor Vanessa Raphaely maintains

that it's old-fashioned to be prescriptive about fashion, shopping and sex. She aims to fill her pages with real women, their stories and experiences. The tone will be questioning and not imply that there is only one way for women to be, by airing different opinions and truths. She will not allow the magazine to speak with one voice for all women, but rather provide a platform for many voices. (1995a:14)

The change in editor, here, is severally envisaged, each instance being tied to the progressivity of the title even as its primary emphases on "fashion, shopping and sex" must be maintained so as not to alienate readers. (Notice, too, that 'the progressive' is put to work in the service of what is imagined to be a *positive* force field of modernity, rather than a trendy 'new-fangledness'.) The editorial transfer is presented as being in keeping with a modern, progressive belief in women as independent agents rather than passive victims, and this new authority is projected as soon to be manifested, within the pages of the magazine, through ordinary, recognisable self-representations of South African femaleness rather than only unattainable fantasies (whether class or race-based), and through variety, pluralism, and multiculturalism, rather than homogeneous Female Authority. The shifts are surely not unconnected to those which are influencing the realisation of a democratic new South Africa. The envisaged authority of the title, indeed, can only derive from the diversely reconceptualised South African womanhoods currently confronting local magazine

publishers and about to be represented in the new *Cosmopolitan* itself. Moreover, that the magazine is considered to be a valuable and powerful agent of a politicised female discursivity is implied in the phrasing "provide a platform".

Yet it should not be thought that the sea-changes occurring in a magazine like *Cosmopolitan* are beyond the surge of contradiction and semantic struggle. As much is implicit even in a brief comment made by Vanessa Raphaely. She maintains that

Cosmo is shifting under my editorship, but it would have done so in any case, because *Cosmo* worldwide is having to engage in some navel gazing, as women change and each country changes....It was the first magazine of its type and has suffered from being copied, which has diffused its appeal. In a way it has to reinvent itself. Not its core, perhaps, but in its language. We are going to focus more on South Africa and be more specific to the South African context. We'll be less prescriptive. There will be more stories, more reporting. (Cited in McNeill 1996:23)

Even were we to put aside, for the moment, the more dramatic tensions and awkwardnesses entailed by the devolving of power from mother to daughter (Raphaely senior made the situation difficult by reminding readers that she would not be disappearing but merely taking 'a back seat' in her capacity as managing director of the group which publishes *Cosmopolitan*), the spaces which the younger Raphaely wishes to claim for current *Cosmopolitan* are not available to her without rhetorical intervention and even inventiveness. Indeed, it does not seem too extreme to categorise Vanessa Raphaely's position as a semiotic quandary. Let me take up only a few points. A change of editorship is inevitably associated with difference and movement: 'change' would not be so-called were it not a syntactic and experiential marker of which human beings demand distinction and difference from that which has preceded. At the same time, though, the house style of a title cannot be so dramatically reworked as to render the brand unrecognisable to readers. In other words, under Vanessa Raphaely's editorship *Cosmopolitan* will be different, but it will also be the same. This oxymoron makes the title available to readers through both the comfort of the familiar, and the thrill of the unknown. The new editor of *Cosmopolitan* finds herself having to suggest that under her aegis the title will 'develop', will better answer to the demands of modern South African women, even as she must to some degree perpetuate the idea that *Cosmopolitan* has historically been at the vanguard of modern femaleness. The uncomfortable implication is that in its earlier incarnations the title *did* in some respects fail to meet the needs of its readers, despite widespread claims made by the previous editor for the title's progressivity and advancement. Phrases such as, "less prescriptive", for example, carry Vanessa Raphaely's opinion that earlier versions of *Cosmopolitan* *did* dictate to women preferred female narratives that she considers to have been constraining. Yet the phrase cannot also but convey the rhetorical force with which even the new, improved *Cosmopolitan* will continue to 'prescribe', to disseminate notions of femaleness that Vanessa Raphaely regards as more appropriately contemporary. The very language she uses, in other words, constructs women's magazines (or *Cosmopolitan* as an exemplar), as entailing a curious dynamic – a dilemma, if you will – of liberation and constraint. Perhaps most importantly, her comments remind me that 'liberation' and 'constraint' are neither diametrically opposite nor historically immutable terms. It is perplexing but altogether possible that a woman may feel herself at different moments limited and released by an image or idea which is on the surface empirically 'the same'. Indeed, her investments in the text of a women's magazine may be such that she has no wish to designate her reading self through binaristic models. (These are matters to which I return later in the Chapter.)

Women's Magazines: Cracking the Critical Insistence on Constraining 'Contradiction'

Turning from the business of women's magazines back to the realms of intellectual interpretation gives further incentive to 'open' up the habituated negative analysis of women's magazines; what is needed is a closer reading into the discursive power struggles that underlie even the apparently monist academic critique. Let me begin by returning to McClintock's article. Having affirmed that images possess absolutely determining power within women's magazines, she must nevertheless deal with the fact that the "world of the woman's magazine is run through and through with ... contradictory imperatives" (1978:22). In order to sustain her theoretical position, she is obliged to locate such contradiction as being further indicative of, rather than problematically related to, economic and political control. However she simultaneously and repeatedly stresses the interruptible, dispersed female 'selves' which are promoted in 'the women's magazine'

a woman with a fragmented grip on herself and on reality will be that much more acquiescent in having her most basic responses contoured from without. The woman's magazine is a fragmented, contradictory, colourful, sensational, fluctuating dreamworld by which the woman's gaze is continually diverted from the political, social and psychological realities of her situation. Despite the (ineffectual) liberal gestures of the *Fair Lady* editorials and the odd article on squatter women, the women's condition, Gloria Steinem etc. both *Darling* and *Fair Lady* are, for obvious economic reasons, endemically conformist and narrow-visioned. (McClintock 1978:22)

For McClintock, contradiction is thus integral to the text's domination of its readers: 'contradiction' is a fractured logic which misleads women into believing that if they simply apply themselves and exercise self-discipline, they can 'have it all'. The overall responsibility for happiness and success is placed on the individual, deflecting attention from deep structural inequalities. Contradiction is beyond resolution; it ensures that women will be infinitely provoked (or seduced) into meeting impossible and paradoxical demands and ideals, and will thus always require the advice and assistance of the personalised, intimate, romanticised discourses which constitute 'the women's magazine'. The implicit agenda is that 'having it all' is an injunction to consume. Thus the master social narrative of patriarchal capitalism is served by and indeed profits from the inconsistency of female discourses, rather than being fundamentally challenged.

Are not readings other than McClintock's possible? Might it not be in the very "fragmented, contradictory, colourful, sensational, fluctuating" real/dreamworld which she criticises that several important 'meanings' of women's magazines reside? (It is fair to observe that in 1978 McClintock might not have had available to her the theoretical language to formulate different possibilities.) Despite her verdict and critical intention, McClintock's comments can be taken to imply that there are ambiguous spaces associated with women's magazines: the texts do not simply repress (or secure) liberation. They are ambivalently implicated in women's imagining of their femaleness(es).

The research into women's magazines by Ballaster *et al* (1991) – carried out markedly later and in more detail than McClintock's – also reclaims areas of contradiction in the text as constitutive of a disabling, fractured female subjectivity. Ballaster *et al* identify ideological inconsistencies such as the following: looking through any women's magazine, it is difficult to say what is women's work and what is women's pleasure; a women's magazine asks women to identify with the text because it is a women's magazine, but the images and copy represent femaleness as problematic anxiety and as absent cultural knowledge that urgently demands to be made present; women's magazines paradoxically present social realism alongside fantasy: you 'see yourself' and 'your' experience reflected in the pages, yet the text also leads you to expect release from the limitations of your everyday self.

In order to reinforce their primarily negative critique, Ballaster *et al* (1991), like McClintock, find themselves having to deny that contradiction – an ‘illogicality’ which unsettles linear logic – represents a possible ‘opening’ in the ideologically powerful Female narrative into which women’s magazines supposedly discipline their readers. They argue that the elements of paradox, tension and contradiction which they discuss are in ‘the final analysis’ managed on the text’s own terms so as to persuade the reader to accept the text’s insistent, embedded ideological meaning: Woman. The woman’s magazine, they claim, “determines the range of possible meanings and assumptions implicit in its own text, what kind of life is seen as a struggle, and what is easy, or can be taken for granted” (Ballaster *et al* 1991:131). (Hermes [1995] is scathing about the pedantic moral pieties evident in this analysis.) While they acknowledge the paradox of “constant movement and relative stasis” (1991:121) in the form and content of the woman’s magazine, and while they fairly reluctantly identify areas of equivocation and schism, their preferred reading constructs the genre as recalcitrant to ‘real’ change.

Surely the matter is not quite this straightforward? Merely in acknowledging the contradictions constitutive of the discourses prevalent in women’s magazines, Ballaster *et al* despite themselves imply that the meanings which may be attached to women’s magazines are elusive and unresolved, rather than masterfully managed by critics such as themselves. While such meanings are unlikely to refute completely those critical theses premised on The Culture Industry, they do goad us as critics into being more creative when theorising people’s investments in contemporary culture. The drive towards authoritative univocality in Ballaster *et al*’s *Women’s Worlds* (1991) is heightened when we understand that the volume is not an edited collection of separate essays by individual authors, but a single volume written (ostensibly) collectively by four researchers. However, instead of misrepresenting ‘the woman’s magazine’ as susceptible to appraisal from the dystopian position implied in the sub-title *Ideology, Femininity and the Woman’s Magazine*, Ballaster, Beetham, Frazer and Hebron might more self-reflexively have explored their divergences in belief – which they briefly acknowledge in the introduction, and just as briefly mention in the conclusion: they are four individuals, with different opinions on the history and subject matter of the British women’s periodical press. A more thorough attempt to make such differences a foundational element of their approach might have given rise to a volume that represents through the very process of writing the difficulty of harnessing women’s magazines in the service of one, authoritative critical paradigm. Instead, we are presented with a work in which readings that do not fit the preferred paradigm are merely haltered, and then led into the corral, and in which a few remarks in the conclusion are meant to accommodate the always-unsettling dissenting voice which raises the possibility that the primarily negative line taken in the volume does not account for all responses to the genre of the women’s magazine.

Another, South African instance in which contradiction is claimed negatively occurs in the transcription, published in the journal *Agenda*, of a discussion carried out under the aegis of South African feminists Cheryl de la Rey and Michelle Friedman. (The discussion is far more nuanced than I can convey here in citing only one section which bears explicitly on women’s magazines.) De la Rey and Friedman set the scene by explaining that “at this point, we asked participants to talk about notions of power, specifically power and sex, in a positive sense, for example, when one enjoys the sexual feelings of one’s body and the pleasure of desire... – this is a very powerful feeling, a feeling of power” (1996:44). In reply ‘Lindy’ (Wilbraham, to whose work on advice columns I have already referred) says

Fair Lady, Femina, and You magazines....I think, yes, there is a certain kind of discourse around encouraging women to discover their power as objects, and that draws in this whole kind of slimming business, the beautification cosmetic business, because there is enormous power for women in being desirable, and desired objects. I am never quite sure any more whether that is a male gaze, because I

think that gaze has become quite a female gaze too now. Women watch other women, and women can read signs on other women. Women look at other women as if it is men looking at other women. You know that is problematic for me, because I think it is passive...no, it's rather encouraging women to actively take care of themselves and to wear slinky things, and to fit more cosily into feminine stereotypes because, through doing that, they are able to discover more power, in terms of heterosexual relationships, because there is more power in being a beautiful object. (1996:44-45)

I value the conversational quality of Wilbraham's observations, as well as her initial willingness to admit confusion. But she moves towards oversimplification in invoking ostensibly absolute stereotypes, even as she must herself perform complex sophistry on the labels passive and active. As the final section of this Chapter will illustrate, there *are* non-suppressive ways in which to theorise contradiction. The very paradoxical elements through which women's magazines proclaim contemporary femininity could be allowed by the theorist to represent the impossibility of something called 'Woman'; the fluidity rather than the achieved security of even the imagined female community wishfully summoned into existence by the genre 'women's' magazine could then be admitted. (I make a similar point about men's magazines and masculinity in endnote 4.)

As I belatedly discovered, my own struggle to devise productive connections between various texts, audiences and contexts of women's magazines corresponded with that of McRobbie. In her book *Feminism and Youth Culture* (1991), McRobbie explains that over a period of about ten years she had found herself prompted to revise her original position on the British magazine *Jackie*, for teenage girls. In her initial work, conducted in the late-1970s, McRobbie stressed how the magazine *would* be read in terms of the "consensual totality of feminine adolescence" which determines "that all girls want to know how to catch a boy, lose weight, look their best and be able to cook". She described the magazine as inviting participation in a "closed sorority of shared feminine values which actively excludes other possible values" (1991:84).

When she first began to research magazines aimed at a (youthful) female readership, the field was relatively unexplored and, like me, McRobbie initially assumed that magazines for a female audience entailed 'ideological onslaught'. But McRobbie subsequently revised her initial position under the promptings of specifically magazine-oriented research by critics such as Winship (1987), and analyses of romance by Radway (1984), as well as general shifts in critical theory and feminism from the 1970s to the 1990s which encouraged an increased willingness to construct the *audience* as an active participator in the creation of meaning. In reassessing her original position, for instance, McRobbie refers in her Introduction to Martin Barker's criticism of her work: the "unified notion" that girls were incapable of countering the supposed force of the female narrative, "or even of setting it alongside other different meanings they were encountering elsewhere"; this "was blind not only to the readers but also to the internal tensions and contradictions which disrupt the magazine, making it more open to contestation than might otherwise be imagined" (McRobbie 1991:141). Such failures, we know, were characteristic of many studies of the 'mass audience' produced by left-oriented critique and positivist communication theory. As McRobbie puts it: magazines "have been recognised as key cultural forms reflective [*sic*] of distinctively feminine pleasures" (McRobbie 1991:135). Moves "in girls' magazines away from the old terrain of traditional femininity, have been paralleled in Media Studies with the development of what might be described as a more reader-centred approach cognisant of different readers and contexts, and the production of multiple meanings" (McRobbie 1991:137). Autobiographical-theoretical reappraisals such as McRobbie's have encouraged me to allow the movement of my own ideas, as I struggle to retrieve women's magazines as potentially valuable, and at least interesting cultural forms, even as they also trade in what some might classify as restrictive images and experiential repertoires. It has also begun to seem that

even were I, as English Studies researcher, to elect a more textual than reader-oriented emphasis, for me to insist on a single, coherent textual meaning in any magazine would be to repress all kinds of inconsistencies and surprises which are manifest in the magazine text 'itself', as well as in readers' diverse mobilisations of textual material.

Readers, Texts, Critics: Unstable Conjectures

In devising a critical response to women's magazines, then, the problem has emerged as: how to address ambiguity and fracture *in the text*, and how to take some account of *readers*; how to avoid what McRobbie calls a narrow structuralism in which texts are treated as self-referential sign systems, even while having to admit that respondents' accounts of their magazine reading could not, either, be taken at face value.

Notwithstanding my happening on revisions such as McRobbie's – which were effected primarily in the context of sociology – there have been difficulties attending my attempt to realign a textual emphasis so that it acknowledges readers. I must elaborate on some of these. Firstly, I have had to recognise that I am dealing with several different conceptions of 'the reader'. There is feminist oriented reader-reception theory, for example, which seems, to me, to have functioned especially within the context of academic reading, and primarily in relation to conventional academic texts, despite also having debunked misogynistic treatment of women in the work of bestselling popular male authors such as Norman Mailer. And then there is the kind of sociological 'field work' which has attempted to ascertain the nature and nuances of reader response beyond the realm of the university. My work on women's magazines consciously situates itself between these two positions.

Let me pursue, for a while, the notion of the reader as it has become important to academic feminist reader-reception, for I see the *awkward* nature of the relationships of feminism and reader-response as offering useful gaps in which to develop the kinds of reappraisals of women's magazine material that I am seeking.

Part of the difficulty in feminism's use of reader-response, as Patrocino Schweikart (1986) notes, is that reception theory has not always been self-conscious about the suppression, in prevailing models of reading, of gender and politics. The predominant preoccupations of reader-response criticism over the last two decades have been the relative authorities granted to readers and texts, without consideration of criteria such as gender and race. What constitutes the objectivity of the text? What is in the text, what is in the reader? For several theorists, readers hold the controlling interest, reading the texts 'they have made'. Others acknowledge the creative role of the reader, but maintain that the text is the privileged partner in that we read from *its* promptings. The vacillation is thus between reader-dominant and text-dominant poles and, paradoxically, the more active a reader, the more s/he is often considered by reader-response theorists to be manipulated by the promptings of the text or the author.

Feminist criticism(s) could seem to offer a way out of this, since it is but a small step from the thesis that the reader is an active producer of meaning to the recognition that there are many different kinds of readers, and that women – because of their numbers if because of nothing else – constitute a 'class'. It is certainly true that a broadly-conceived (and particularly Anglo-American) feminist criticism has generally incorporated substantial reader-centred focusses, and might help to clarify reader-response as a strategy. The feminist entry into the debate foregrounds the nature of the text, since for feminists, the question of *how* we read is thoroughly implicated in *what* we read. The universalising tendency of university education, for instance, has encouraged women to imagine themselves male, to create male-allied empathies and affinities with the paradigmatic human experience. And if, in response, a feminist inquiry into reading and

literature has emphasised that the reading of an androcentric canon is variously detrimental to female readers, the implication is that there are 'other' texts which 'better' represent female experience.

So far so good. Yet feminism, in seeking to turn reader-response criticism to its own advantage, has often exhorted feminists to imagine themselves as authentic readers against a yet-to-awaken mass of unenlightened 'ordinary' women, many of whom were reading 'popular' women's texts such as romances, soap operas and magazines. In the work of a critic such as Elaine Showalter, this takes the extreme form of gynocritics, where a premise seems to be that 'we' (properly progressive women) have outgrown the need 'merely' to focus on women as readers and consumers, and our concern now is with women as writers and producers. Within such a teleology, reading – even resistant reading – is but a minor form of agency; there is no allowing for reading as an ideologically overdetermined, obscure, difficult-to-trace practice. Showalter aside, academic feminist versions of reader-response have often valorised women's production of *positive images* of women in *literary* works as the most demonstrable affirmation of women's worth and power, where the adjective 'positive' implies an embedded moral impulse. In terms of this framework, women's magazines, far from depicting women in admirable ways, have been regarded as mass-produced texts which necessarily configure women's experience and image in degraded ways (through sexualised representations intended for the male rather than the female gaze, for instance, and by repeatedly situating women within the marginalised sphere of domestic labour). Women's magazines thus furthered women's 'imasculation', and were as much a target for the resisting reader as any overtly misogynistic novel. As I have already mentioned, in her volume *Reading Women's Magazines* (1995), Hermes takes issue with the puritanical pedagogic force which structures this feminist morality. She explains that she has "never felt very comfortable with the majority of (feminist) work that has been done on women's magazines. Almost all of these studies show *concern* rather than *respect* for those who read women's magazines" (1995:1), a concern that women are "unable to see for themselves how bad such texts" are; a concern that women "need to be enlightened; they need good feminist texts in order to be saved from their false consciousness and to live a life free of false depictions as mediated by women's magazines" (1995:1).

When it came to the body of mass or popular material, then, which many feminists habitually considered to be by its nature repressive, feminism needed to take on some important questions: what might be the emotional and/or utopian potentials of apparently compromised texts? If a text seems to constrain women's potential, why may it also attract women into its designs? Why might some women find women's magazines appealing even after hit jobs by feminist SWAT teams? The usual answer – "the power of false consciousness into which women as well as men have been socialized – oversimplifies the problem and prevents us from comprehending both the force" of the text in question, and the complexity of our response to it (Schweikart 1986:42).

The tortuous webs of feminism and reader-response led me in my research on women's magazines to address the matter of the women's magazine audience. In what ways, I found myself asking, do women 'other' than me – and besides professional critics – respond to women's magazines? I had already met a possible response in the reaction of students to my lectures, but formulating answers seemed to demand that I contact mass readers of women's magazines in leisure contexts, turning from a literary-textual, reader-response emphasis on the academic implied audience, to sociology and literary-sociology's reconstituting of 'ordinary' readers as a valuable source of information about reading, and even as a new form of research legitimization. As I've said, this was recognised by McRobbie (1991) when re-evaluating her previous attitude

to girls' magazines: she locates her new position in terms both of actual shifts in magazine content ("the decline of romance"), and changes in theory, citing a movement from a text-centred, structuralist approach towards a new version of the culturalism pioneered in the work of E.P. Thompson and Raymond Williams. 'Ethnographic' studies such as Paul Willis's research into working class young men in *Learning to Labour* (1977), for instance, while sober about the narrow cultural capitals available to certain classes of Briton, also treated 'ordinary' people and 'lived experience' not as dully impotent and ever-susceptible to manipulation, but as vital agents that produced a 'way of life'. Such approaches to the audience and cultural consumption have been especially useful in media studies. The much-debated, landmark research is that carried out by David Morley (1986) into television audiences. Using an interdisciplinary frame, Morley, as part of his early investigations, interviewed eighteen white, working class and lower middle class London families, hoping to relate gender and leisure to the shifting structures of television viewing. Within work more specifically on women readers, there is Janice Radway's analysis of women's readings of popular romances (1984), and Ien Ang on the television soap opera *Dallas* (1985).¹⁰

All of these studies contrived to make me comprehend that I would never seamlessly reconcile the contexts and valued knowledges of academic analysis with an ethnography of 'the ordinary'. (See also Nightingale [1993].) Yet they also encouraged me to discuss women's magazines with students and with wo/men friends: did they read, look at, use magazines in any way? Why? Which magazines? And especially *women's* magazines? Did they prefer local or international titles? Why? and so on. It is this kind of material, partly represented through the social science predilection for 'data', which forms the bulk of Hermes's book (1995). Subsequent to my conversations with readers, I thought to publish a letter about my research in the letters pages of *Cosmopolitan*, *Femina* and *True Love*, which were magazines circulating the readership profiles and female discourses that I was keen to investigate. I had previously seen similar letters in which researchers used the woman's magazine as a communicative channel to 'women', asking them to participate in studies on topics such as breast cancer, abortion and abuse. No letters that I had seen, though, asked readers specifically about their experiences of the magazine genre.

Three letters were duly sent off. As it happens, I was given page space only in *Cosmopolitan*. The body of the letter read

Ever thought about the reasons we read 'women's magazines'; about the sometimes contradictory pleasures of information and escape involved? Which are the best bits and which could be improved? Are all women's magazines the same or are there some that you prefer? When do you read magazines, or do you tend to 'look' at them?

I realise that such questions are not often thought through consciously, but my PhD involves researching people's relationships with 'the magazine' as a form of popular culture, so your responses and observations will be extremely valuable. (March 1995:8)

The request elicited fifteen written replies, thirteen of which were from women (of diverse cultural affiliation) who characterised themselves as more-or-less middle class, as well as five telephone calls in which the women, again culturally different, asked me questions about my project, and responded to my questions. If I was partly disappointed at the number of replies, I have to admit to having been momentarily charged by the thought that I now had access to 'real' readers. (My small-scale attempt to materialise readers does not give reading and situatedness the pre-eminence they have in Hermes's research, which is based on interviews with eighty people.) My respondents included

* a third-year sociology student from Zimbabwe studying at the University of the Witwatersrand. (She was conducting research into the coercive femininity popularised in women's magazines, and we subsequently corresponded several times by e-mail);

- * a single, 22 year-old English-speaking 'scholarship girl' and "magazine junkie" studying for an MA in literature;
- * a married, Afrikaans-speaking university graduate with no children who characterised herself as "a magazine 'addict'";
- * a black man from Hammarsdale, in KwaZulu-Natal, for whom English was a second language;
- * a 55 year-old married woman and part-time lecturer who referred to herself as "a magazine 'addict'";
- * a young, black Zambian woman who had recently embarked on a banking career;
- * an overworked female senior executive from Houghton;
- * a white, middle-aged widow who read several titles for ideas and activities relevant to her life;
- * a white, middle-aged retiree who especially enjoyed crosswords, recipes and celebrity stories;
- * a temporary lecturer in English at an English-speaking South African university who was both irked by and interested in women's magazines.

This catalogue no doubt misrepresents the respondents in some respects, but I have tried to foreground markers of identity that are emphasised in the letters. The letters suggest that respondents read women's magazines for various reasons (what else had I expected?). The most frequently cited are education and relaxation, and I had to wonder whether readers had been primed by the caption 'Info or escape' given by the editor to my letter. (Hermes, however, claims similar justifications for the readers of *Cosmopolitan* and domestic weeklies whom she interviewed: they read mainly for "entertainment and practical advice" [1995:186].) Education and relaxation are related by my correspondents to both content and form: they variously value the light yet interesting articles on personalities, movies, trends in beauty and decorating; the more serious investigations of social, cultural and health issues; the short advice. Some readers comment on the pleasure they take in the competitions and free gifts, and some are critical of women's magazines' tendency to ignore the fashion and beauty needs of the 'larger woman'. The general 'women's magazine' format is seen to be conducive both to informal, casual reading, and more focussed inquiry. A number of the letters also indicate the magazine reader's willingness to read in different ways for different purposes. Instead of paraphrasing here, I shall quote at length from two letters.

I seriously started reading magazines quite recently. Previously I used to just flip through the pages and pick out eye-catching titles or pictures.

My interest in reading magazines came about when I took up a new job with an international organisation. My salary trebled, I began to meet and mix with so many different people. This helped me in so many ways, particularly my point of view of life in general.

Now to answer your question. I read women's magazines particularly *Cosmopolitan* because it makes me feel a part of the 'world community'. I am able to identify myself with other women, share similar problems, thoughts and hopes.

In my opinion the magazine further helps me to keep up to date with basic global information without having to read or hear all the news in the world. (In this part of the world we have limited access to information due to customs or society norms, and the high cost of living.)

Clearly, lastly, women's magazines are interesting otherwise I wouldn't bother to read them.

Then there is this letter, from Mr D.S. Mtshali, where he explains that

[w]omen magazines are fascinating, especially with their 'career columns'. I find them extremely informative on current issues such as abortion. Besides being informative, they introduce a reader into the world of fantasy. This is acquired through their perfect pictorial layout.

I would be delighted if women magazine publishers accept the fact that there are almost as many male readers as there are female, and start perceiving their magazine as unisex. Besides, it will facilitate the struggle against gender segregation and inequality.

Though most women magazines are superb, some are more preferable to me than others. They definitely differ, in approach, layout and in some cases even the quality of the paper. I usually read them during my leisure time.

In part, I intend the citing of the letters to function as an authenticating apparatus, but my very use of the letter as a framing device to solicit readers' response is not devoid of intellectual compromise, since the idiom and register inevitably mediate the replies. For instance: although

I do not specify *women*, although one of the respondents is a man and although women's magazines are said by market researchers to have a growing number of male readers, the publication of my letter in the context of a woman's magazine implicitly assumes a putative, primarily female collectivity. Informing the discourse of the letter is an assumption that *women* are readers of women's magazines. The letter, in hoping to solicit response, also mimics the friendly, even intimate tone which Ballaster *et al* (1991), Winship (1987) and Chris Weedon (1987) argue is typical of the coercive feminised discourses through which women's magazines repeatedly position women within a restricted, private world. Wilbraham notes in relation to advice columns that such 'intimacy' is part of a regime of visibility, and in effect functions as an apparatus of self-regulation and subjection (1997:66). Further, the very prominence granted the subject of magazine reading in the context of my letter is out of the ordinary, so that readers are asked to relate *consciously* to an activity which, as Hermes emphasises, frequently occurs within a naturalised quotidian: "magazine reading is a subordinate part of everyday routines that one does not habitually reflect upon" (Hermes 1995:90). Also, while my theoretical familiarity with critiques of reader-cum-audience centred approaches to cultural study has increased my scepticism about the likelihood of discovering any watertight generalisations about the women's magazine reader, in seeking contact with actual readers I clearly hoped to make *material* the terms 'reader' and 'audience', relieving myself of the burden of abstractions such as 'the implied reader' and 'the target audience'. The very verb 'make' in this sentence, however, connotes my own presence, the inevitability of my own fictionalising of 'the empirical readers' I hoped to contact. Much like the ideal reader constructs of reader-response then, the objective truth held out by sociological field work into 'audiences' proved illusory.

Even before seeking readers' responses, I had been aware that letters could not be regarded as inherently meaningful texts representative of 'women readers of magazines' or 'readers of women's magazines'. I knew, through the likes of De Certeau, that "research into reading is rendered difficult by the lack of traces left behind by a practice that slips through all sorts of 'writings'...reading produces no storage of information; it is pure process, without textual form" (1984:170). I also took John Frow's point in relation to reader-response research: 'ethnographic' research such as that conducted by Radway into romance reading "makes the mistake of confusing responses given in interview with the direct experience of the programme" (1995:59). And I knew, similarly, through my familiarity with Hermes's (1995) detailed investigation of women's magazine readerships, as well as McRobbie's research (1991), that the silences and gaps in a respondent's letter might be as important as the areas of emphasis: although a correspondent's names could be imagined to provide a rough guide to race, for example, race was seldom mentioned as being relevant to a discussion of women's magazines. Did this mean an aspiration to a raceless society? A wishful-thinking away of reality? A belief in the erasing capacity of images and consumerism? While interviewees may describe reading as 'restorative', claims McRobbie, it "is what the women do *not* want to talk about which seems to reveal more about their subterfuge reading" (1991:139). I also recollected, from Hermes's study, that many of the black (or what she calls 'coloured') women to whom she had spoken "shared a liberal, equal rights political vocabulary: colour is of no importance to the kind of person you are" (1995:190). As she explained, her

informants acknowledged that there are not many coloured people in magazines or on television, but they also said that they were not totally absent. It seemed more important for them to stress their status as citizens and offer examples that made clear that coloured women are to be seen on the pages of women's magazines and in other media, rather than to stress racial discrimination or lament their unequal status in terms of cultural representation....It could well be the case that many women felt they

would lose face if they talked about everyday racism with a white interviewer who might regard that as affectation, or, alternatively, who might then see them as a victim. (1995:190-191)

The letters in response to my request raised more questions than they answered; the replies of readers were not, in themselves, any guarantor of truth. Yet they facilitated interesting hypotheses.

For the letters, few as they were, along with informal conversations and telephone inquiries, carried a persuasive power. They reinforced the all-too-obvious fact that, at the very least, some women (and some men) read or looked through some women's magazines, and that in doing so they related in more complex ways to the material than arguments of commodity co-optation and pseudo-enlightenment had been willing to countenance. Readers found various aspects variously useful or interesting, meaningful or dull. And even if my impression of readers remained more simulated than actual, more approximate than absolute, this was sufficient to substantiate that some kinds of spaces needed to be found, within academic engagements with women's magazines, for far more creative (and even irregular or irreverent) reader responses to magazine texts than has often been insisted upon. (The overuse of 'some' and 'various', here, is intended to convey my belief that a field and subject matter which have often been rather arrogantly represented by critics as monolithic are in fact susceptible to much less authoritarian critical judgement. I cannot erase my uncertainty.)

If my discussion of readers' letters appears vague and impressionistic, rather than scientific, let me remark that I consciously discarded, in trying to make more human and detailed my understanding of women's magazine audiences, several categorisations of readers which present themselves as more theoretically precise. This applies not only to the marketing divisions which I have already shown to be inadequate, but also to classifications generated by sociocultural scientists. Ballaster *et al.*, for instance, carefully elaborate a tripartite structuration of the ways in which women read magazines. They refer to readings which are "'displaced' and 'mediated' ...rather than 'transparent'" (1991:133). The transparent reading, they maintain, "is that which works in co-operation with the text, adopting the stance of the implied reader encouraged by the text" (1991:133). In contrast, the "mediated reading negotiates with the forms and conventions of the genre, recognising and reporting it without necessarily expressing agreement or empathy" (1991:133). Lastly, the "displaced reading adopts the position of the implied reader in order to criticise it, commenting that someone else, if they (*sic*) were reading this, would think" such and such (1991:133). These are useful *working* categories in understanding women's (people's?) responses to women's magazines: some of my respondents, for example, were well able to discuss formal and thematic features of the text; comment on layout, and on the repetition of styles, genres and subjects. But Ballaster *et al.*'s categories cannot codify, exhaustively or even necessarily accurately, the range and complexity of readers' possible responses. McRobbie (1991:161-165) constructs similar categories in relation to the reading of advice columns: realist, feminist and Foucauldian. Although she invokes Foucault's conception of power as occurring not merely structurally but at the micro, individual level, she runs the risk, like Foucault himself, of implying that personal response is invariably determined by the overarching structure of Power. In McRobbie's case, this power is the Female ideology exemplified in the advice text. I, however, heeding De Certeau's observations (1984) concerning reading as involving camouflage and subterfuge, remain perplexed about how to decide with certainty that a respondent's reading is evidence primarily of co-optation. Thus I am not inclined to consider *any* reading 'transparent' or 'determined', however obvious or easy or co-operative it might appear to be. *All* readings involve forms of negotiation and mediation, repression and recognition. These may be subtle or less nuanced, and researchers into reading processes need to acknowledge that they are producing hypotheses rather than unconditional, empirical data.

I would think that the kind of gaze which marks many readers' responses to women's magazines – fractured, perhaps, or intermittent, or multifocal – is different from the unidirectionality which has frequently been assumed to characterise women's interactions with femininity, and the female, as they are represented in women's magazines. (Whether this monism is actualised in readers' experiences or is simply the assertion of the critic is impossible to say.) Interestingly, whatever their ultimate attempt to marshall women's magazines through a moralising monologia, Ballaster *et al* allow that their "discussions with readers show that they *are* conscious of the magazine as bearers of particular discourses of femininity (domesticity, glamour, maternity) and similarly conscious that the magazines' primary means of address to specific groups of women is through their use of commodity display" (1991:130). As I argue following Morris (1993b) in Chapter 4 on The Lost City as themed leisure resort: since consumer culture tends deliberately to foreground the polyvalent discourses through which contemporary subjectivity is able to be imagined, it is anachronistic to speak of 'discourses' as if they were categories possessed of the mysteriously persuasive capacities of myth, rather than bodies of knowledge which may be negotiated and even performatively staged. This kind of critical consciousness could be taken to imply that readers are not necessarily reading, or looking, at women's magazines with the direct, unmediated perspective which is the foundation of Ballaster *et al*'s assumptions. The correlative is that if critics need to give their research projects reasonably coherent critical narratives, they should also be aware that the experiences associated with the reading of women's magazines may refuse domineering mastery, and are more 'accurately' to be recuperated by a research paradigm which accommodates the possibilities of divergence co-existing alongside uneasy alliance and temporary connection.

In theorising women's magazines, therefore, I have manoeuvred between the responses characterised by Hermes (1995) as concern and respect. As I have already indicated, feminist critics have often treated the texts of mass culture directed at a female audience as cause for moral concern, and have been preoccupied with the need to protect gullible 'users' from themselves and false enlightenment. Hermes argues, instead, that readers demand respect, and she tries not to equate this with mere valorisation. She explains that she is influenced by Winship's admirable critical reflexivity in her monograph *Inside Women's Magazines* (1987), which is primarily a *textual* study of magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* and *Woman's Own*, but which also moves towards a rudimentary recognition of the reader in presenting the magazine texts as filtered through a single *reader*, Winship herself. For instance, Winship defends *Cosmopolitan*'s "inclination towards feminism" while still criticising the magazine. As she explains: "My own view is that it is cutting off our nose to spite our face to outlaw wholesale what *Cosmo* stands for, to say nothing of manifesting the worst aspects of a political 'holier than thou' moralism" (1987:115). This is a self-consciousness which Hermes cites as a precedent for her own inclination to avoid an overly puritanical tone in relation to her commodified subject matter. Hermes extends Winship's 'reader' further outward to other readers of women's magazines, and reiterates the need to accept

that readers of all kinds (including we critics) enjoy texts in some contexts that we are critical of in other contexts. I would even go so far as to claim that it is more productive to respect the choices and uncritical acceptance of some readers of genres such as women's magazines than to foreground a distancing criticism or concern towards them all. If, as feminists, we aim to bring about changes in the societies in which we live, we had better understand the investments we and others have in them first. (1995:2)

This is very different from a pessimistic insistence that women's magazines construct their ideal woman as a passive and male-dependent homebody, and negatively socialise real women into this position. This is different, too, from recent assertions that women's magazines and their

predisposition towards the visual perpetuate the beauty myth of contemporary society through their use of excessively thin models: for Naomi Wolf in *The Beauty Myth* – a text which, by the way, has been much-written about in the features and letters pages of South African women's magazines – thinness is a visible way of keeping women *actually* weak and socially inferior (1990). Conclusions like these, Hermes (1995) points out, are premised on prescriptive evaluations of the magazine text and occasionally on the analysis of the magazine production process and the monopolies of ownership; the reader does not feature in any equations of meaningfulness because the magazines are by definition deemed irrelevant to the kinds of meanings which feminists wish a re-imagined society to have. (Nor, might I add, drawing on a point made in Chapter 1 on *Tribute*, have such evaluations done much to allow that even the text is constituted by divergent individuals and ideologies, so that *in* the text there may be differences intentionally managed, as well as unintentional differences which may be ironically managed by the reader.)

Despite taking issue with versions of feminist criticism, Hermes acknowledges herself to be situated within feminism, albeit of a different kind. Like my own, her feminism is influenced by postmodernism, by psychoanalysis, by poststructuralism, by various confluences between these discourses and cultural studies, and it wishes to take account of pleasure as a category of reader response and of textual analysis. In relation to my own position as English Studies researcher and teacher, then, if it does nothing else Hermes's position spotlights the balancing act which the contemporary feminist researcher of media may find herself needing to perform: how to manifest herself as critical intelligence while simultaneously giving approximate voice to an audience; how not to insist on prescriptive meaningfulness (which either implicitly or explicitly claims for itself the status of truth), while at the same time gesturing towards a rearrangement of gendered social relations which implies a criticism of the status quo. How? In encouraging myself to set up a critical debate about 'the women's magazine', I turned to Pleasance's argument concerning female magazines as texts of openness and closure (1991). These terms allowed me to shape my belief that women's magazines as documents of contemporary femaleness could be theorised deconstructively as at once negative *and* positive texts. Pleasance's argument is admirable in seeking to generate a response which is neither dismissive or celebratory. As she says, readings of women's magazines as closed or as open give a different status to dominant culture. In

the first, dominant culture is the site where dominant power relations are both successfully extended and reinforced; any form of resistance is recouped into dominant culture itself. In the second, dominant culture is seen as a site of conflict and struggle, a place where power is never fully or permanently secured; it is thus a site where dominant power relations can be pulled apart and challenged. (1991:69)

Pleasance makes available to researchers a simple interpretative frame and vocabulary which allow them to structure a range of highly different responses to the text. She also prompts researchers to become aware that *they* themselves are instantiators of the interpretative process in which meanings are attributed and denied, rather than merely conduits through which intrinsically textual meanings are 'revealed'. In relation to both the critical framework I was developing and to readers' own use of magazines, I extrapolated Pleasance's ideas to conclude that the ostensible binaries of openness and closure evident in and applied to women's magazines are constructed rather than inherent: they may sometimes be invoked for strategic purpose; sometimes be invested with fantastic desire; sometimes be denied as inadequate.¹¹

Ways in Which to Stage Women's Magazines as More 'Open' Cultural Forms

The various sections of the preceding discussion have demonstrated my conviction that women's magazines may be theorised as comparatively more 'open' cultural entities than has generally been allowed. In the remainder of the Chapter, I argue that any female narratives in women's magazines – and within their contexts of consumption – are often paradoxical in that they draw both from supposedly conservative and supposedly liberatory female discourses. I consider this to be a simple point worth repeating. I do not offer a happy celebration against arguments in which women's magazines are envisaged as co-opted into dominant ideologies like capitalism, middle-classness, racism, sexism and so on. Rather, I try to give real credence to the often repressed truth in critical commentary on women's magazines: that these texts and their contexts of use are sites of struggle over meaning. Despite being produced by Capital for often expedient economic purpose, and despite working with many of the stereotypes that construct female experience, women's magazines may be used by readers to fashion meaningful, self-sustaining subjectivities.

Let me propose, for instance, that women's magazines may have a positively educative purpose. In addressing the possibility of women's magazines as not inherently closed, stereotypical forms, the researcher must consider, for example, that they are widely perceived by readers (including some theorists who in the final analysis prefer a critical reading of women's magazines) as on occasions fulfilling a positive, rather than necessarily repressive educative purpose. Even Ballaster *et al* admit, for example, that if women's magazines restrict their range of influence in defining their readership in the first instance in terms of gender, this means that

women's magazines have also, perforce, been involved in wider changes in women's social role, whether related to demographic shifts, political campaigns, legislation, developments in contraception or more general shifts in attitudes to sexuality and gender roles. Women's magazines have not only responded to all these changes, they have also played a significant part in shaping some of them. (1991:109)

What research into women's magazines needs to work with, then, is a complex dynamic of liberation and control, openness and closure, rather than one thing or another.

Let me refer, here, to a South African women's magazine which is deliberately *not* glossy: *Speak*. *Speak* is described as "a progressive magazine for women...mainly sold in factories and at political rallies and meetings". It "reaches a wide readership, especially among working-class women" (Daymond and Lenta 1990:85). As this speaker, Boitumelo Mofokeng, observes: *Speak* often carries articles on contraception, menstruation, sex, consumer rights, legal rights, budgeting, health problems and other matters that its target readers might struggle to find out about elsewhere. There has been a tendency not to publicise many of these topics, which has had the effect of keeping women in ignorance of their rights (Daymond and Lenta 1990:85-86).

Yet despite such an attempt to secure for a particular kind of women's journal the authoritatively progressive Female position, one in which progressivity is naturalised as primarily working class and radically feminist, the subject matters and intentions in terms of which *Speak*'s socially-useful status are imagined are by no means exclusive to this title. Each of the South African 'glossies' *Cosmopolitan*, *True Love*, *Femina* and *Fair Lady* carries the explicitly educative features in terms of which feminist critics praise *Speak*. They regularly feature any and all of the topics listed above. These may appear alongside advertising for consumer goods, but at the same time they themselves advertise, much as *Speak* advertises or strives to endorse, a number of overtly liberatory narratives for contemporary South African womanhood.

As the letters which I received in response to my request for readers' accounts of their experiences of women's magazines might suggest, readers often value the *information* which women's magazines make available to them. Women's magazines are instrumental in giving

substantial page space – and, we must conjecture, some degree of readers’ head space – to matters that are contentious, repressed, marginalised. In the various forms of survey, detailed investigative journalism, personal anecdote and editorial, women’s magazines give women access to informed comment on topics such as incest, polygamy, abortion, lobola, the new constitution, and the death penalty, as well as advice about completing tax returns, breaking the glass ceiling in business, and starting a small business. If women need (and admit to needing) discussion on such topics, it hardly makes them victims. Nor can we easily claim that the *editorial attitudes* to subjects that women’s magazines do open up are intrinsically conservative, superficially sensationalist, liberal capitalist, or romantically individualist. As my arguments in Chapter 1 indicate, I consider the consumer magazine genre to be usefully able to accommodate ideological difference alongside moments of attempted coherence, and that far from securing an uncontested ideological symmetry these texts allow readers to measure their own beliefs against those of an eclectically-represented other.

Many readers claim that women’s magazines provide an important forum for the dissemination and ‘discussion’ of information which is otherwise difficult to come by. All readers might not participate continuously in women’s magazines’ circulation of female capital – indeed, they might value precisely the ease with which even the intermittent reader may re-enter the ‘discussion’ – but they do like to conceive of their reading of women’s magazines partly in terms of ‘usefulness’. The value may lie in sexual advice: a magazine such as *Cosmopolitan* has over the years given many column inches to the subject of sex and previously taboo topics. (This notwithstanding claims by cynics that the impulse to expose sexual matters is motivated by a prurience designed to boost off-the-shelf sales.) It might reside in information on sexual health or health in general. Even Ballaster *et al*, despite finally dismissing women’s magazines, admit that these texts have “been very voluble in raising readers’ awareness of the importance of cervical smears and regular breast examination” (1991:155). It might be information about contested sociopolitical matters, and it might be the showcasing of strong, positive role models for readers to emulate. Or it might even be advice that some critics would regard as having to do with supposedly trivial, stereotypical women’s concerns. As Thandi Maponya, editor of *Thandi*, remarks of the appeal of black women’s magazine titles for black women: “Black women want the gloss but they also want practical information. They want to know how to conduct themselves....Many of them are working in offices or pursuing professional careers, but they grew up in working class families and they were not exposed as children to dress codes and etiquette and the use of cosmetics” (Cited in Bierbaum 1995:61).

An argument for women’s magazines as fulfilling a valuable educative function is a tactic which corresponds fairly closely with feminist attempts to recuperate positive images of woman in a variety of texts, from novels to film. For if, as any number of theorists have reminded us – Nava and McRobbie, for instance, in their introduction to the edited collection *Gender and Generation* (1984) – it is not sufficient merely to offer women ‘positive images’ which counter deficient representations, it certainly is something. An emphasis on this kind of educative agency could be one way of bringing women’s magazines within the ambit of literary Feminism; and it could also allow a magazine’s publishers and ‘authoring’ editorial team some degree of intention beyond the expediently economic: an interest in giving women information, for instance, or in proposing both affirmatory and aspirational markers.

A useful shorthand for gleaning examples of material which might fulfil a valuable educative function is to glance at the contents pages of women’s magazines. (See Figures 3.ii, 3.iii, 3.v and 3.vi.) In March 1997, *Cosmopolitan*’s regular slots include “body & soul” (under which we find features such as “Try T’ai Chi” where readers are encouraged to “improve mental

wellbeing and fitness” through an “ancient Chinese martial art”; or “The Smart Woman’s Medicine Cabinet: Conventional and alternative remedies for emergencies at home”) and “cosmo helps” (which offers relationship-, career-related and financial advice, as well as women’s career success stories: “Keep your job and get ahead”; “Money Power: rands and sense”; and an “Agony column by Irma Kurtz”). Other women’s magazines have analogous sections and features. In April 1997, *Femina*’s “Good Advice” features “The Sexpert’s Guide”, while “Opinions” contains the column “Taking Issue” in which a topical matter is subjected to multifaceted inquiry. Even the general features illustrate local and global female success stories (“Charlize Theron: Made in Benoni”), exemplary women (“Alison, *Femina*’s Woman of Courage, Marries”), financial advice (“100 Ways to Save Money”), and contentious issues such as “Gay couples and adoption”, “Where Widows are Outcasts: Indian women waiting for death” and “Is there sex after childbirth? What to do about postnatal loss of libido”. There is also a story on controversial Indian filmmaker Mira Nair, “The woman who put the *KamaSutra* on film”. *True Love*’s regulars entail the use of similar material and categories: “Young & Gifted”, “Money Matters”, “Health News”, and “Career Info”. The features include stories on child prostitution (“Innocence for Sale: South African children who sell their bodies to survive”); women and the law (“Rights-Minded: The laws that affect women in South Africa today”) and sex (“Sexwise: what men wish women knew about sex”). As I have already argued, even the much-criticised form of the letters page may work in this way – positively rather than necessarily negatively educative.

However, there are major limits to an argument for women’s magazines which rests solely (or even mainly) on their ‘progressively’ educative capacity. Perhaps this is because the education offered by women’s magazines, like *any* education, must work within what I have already acknowledged to be a dynamic of liberation and constraint. (James Donald reminds us in *Sentimental Education* [1992] that the very idea of ‘education’ necessarily implies a policing, a regulating, of behaviour, whether the endpoint is conceived as being liberal, permissive, repressive or any variation on these.) Whatever *Cosmopolitan*’s avowed liberalism or progressivity, for instance, certain matters remain more-or-less taboo. If it is not quite true that a popular morality *precludes* the open discussion of certain topics, it remains the case that this implicit moral yardstick inhibits their being openly advocated. On the one hand, for example, various women’s magazines have entered the debates about pornography or abortion, giving readers the opportunity to express their views in letters and opinion polls; yet none of them is likely to provide a similar forum debating child sex, say, or bestiality. The 1993 updated version of *Cosmopolitan*’s editorial style guide for feature writers lists the following

TABOO SUBJECTS

Bestiality – a no-no.

Anal sex – don’t popularise it.

Oral sex – (see above) should be mentioned only in the context of a relationship.

Vibrators – avoid suggesting they *replace* men.

Bondage, dressing up, rubber etc – any type of ‘kinky’ sex that can be seen as a departure from ‘normal’ sex should be handled with care.

Swinging, wife swapping, group sex etc – avoid.

Promiscuity in the age of Aids is a definite no-no.

Promote safe sex and condoms at every opportunity.

In other words, however far enlightened women’s magazines may extend conceptual and experiential boundaries, they continue to rework the conviction that there are some areas and practices into which women – people – should not be educated. Fair enough – depending on what the practices are. Instead of interpreting this to mean that women’s magazines restrict their readers’ interests and desires, even the negative critic might here be inclined to allow that such regulation is not experienced by most readers as repressive. While some of the practices listed

above might well be regarded as matters of taste and personal choice, rather than as deviances which need to be informally legislated against in the popular media, the dynamic of constraint operative in women's magazines could nevertheless be considered a useful function of women's magazines' investment in the discourses of humanist morality and liberal humanist responsibility that remain central to the western ideal of civil society and properly human social behaviour.

Part of the problem when arguing for women's magazines as positively educative is that within the academic context of contemporary English Studies, a context in which women's writing is frequently incorporated under the banner of feminism, the researcher attributes especial value to the overtly progressive text (forgetting that this is itself a contested term able to be used in self-interested ways). This is the tendency of Ballaster *et al* (1991), and it is certainly one with which I continue to struggle. Although they object to women's magazines as a form which negatively socialises women, they reserve cautious praise for the women's magazine which "acknowledges that homosexuality and lesbianism exist, and also assumes its readers are interested in 'social issues'...[and] provides some coverage of careers (rather than jobs), offering...case-studies of both traditional and non-traditional female occupations" (1991:139). They also commend those magazines "which are willing to incorporate some aspects of cultures other than the dominant one" (1991:141). Translating this to a South African context, one might be inclined, in judging the relative value of women's magazines, to laud those which consciously and challengingly engage with 'race' and the imagining of a new, multiracial South African society. In British women's magazines, it has been said that race "is rarely an issue, and *never* a political issue" – although the authors of this comment are themselves not beyond showing their ideological slips: they at one point refer to "non-white women" (Ballaster *et al* 1991:141). As I have already indicated in my discussion of cross-categorised advertising, however, since the traditionally white *Cosmopolitan*, *Femina* and *Fair Lady* now have approximately 30 to 40% black readerships, 'race' is increasingly, if erratically, visible in the texts as extremely varied skin-tone and as cultural issue along the lines of polygamy, female circumcision, social upliftment, fashion houses' preference for white models, and the exotic.

There is something commendable in attempts by South African women's magazine editors to broaden the range and treatment of subject matters contained in the texts, even though such a comment falls within the discourses of 'concern' criticised by Hermes (1995) and could be dismissed by some as economic expedience. (See Moses in Daymond and Lenta 1990:84). On the whole, while it would be rash to claim that the South African women's magazines on which I focus have miraculously freed themselves from an apartheid past in favour of the developmental processes of the present and the implied teleology of 'the future', it does seem to me that these titles have 'progressed'. Such an opinion of contemporary women's magazines is in keeping with the findings (although they *use* them in ways different from my own) of Ballaster *et al* (1991) and Winship (1987).

But to emphasise political, racial, or educative progressivity as the primary sites of value in women's magazines – to imagine, in other words, that only explicit attention to 'the political', 'the public', 'the democratic' and 'the informative' can legitimate women's magazines as a cultural form – is to disallow many women's actual uses of these texts, even if some of these uses are apparently regressive, banal, or psychically conservative. It is possible, then, that an educative function is not the sole or even primary value envisaged for women's magazines by their readers. In this regard, Hermes's interviews make it clear that many readers consider women's magazines to "offer opportunities for 'emotional learning'. The testimonies and life stories related in features offer readers material for comparison, which may reassure them or help them to define themselves as 'not such a bad mother' or 'colleague' after all" (1995:149-150). Hermes regards these as

“valuable resources for those who are in vulnerable, because low-valued, social positions” (1995:150). Yet her findings in the very same interviews also lead Hermes to dissuade researchers from investing in the fallacy of insistent meaningfulness (1995:148, and 1993), cautioning against an over-intellectual attribution to magazines of a deep, textual significance that is disarticulated from the tendency towards mundaneness in media use. As I understand this, Hermes’s point does not merely allow the critic the comforting claim of “Oh well, if women themselves don’t really see women’s magazines as enduringly ‘valuable’ then clearly these texts *are* trash, as has been argued all along by many intellectuals”. Instead, Hermes urges that research models begin to accommodate unusual perceptions of the culturally worthwhile. Increasingly, for example, I have found myself having to consider that it is not self-evident which material in a woman’s magazine ‘should’ be designated positive, and which negative. Even the intended educative aspect of women’s magazine discourse may be teased out by readers in a leisurely, erratic fashion into material that suits their own contexts. And female pleasure might be taken in the most surprising material: the svelte supermodel body is not automatically interpreted repressively; the domestic need not signify narrow horizons. We require a category more flexible than ‘the educative’ then, if we are to make a convincing case for the women’s magazine. In trying to further my own argument for women’s magazines as heterogeneous sites of contemporary femaleness, let me proceed by offering a number of intersecting routes forward. Working both with the text of the magazine and with possible forms of ‘ordinary’ and ‘intellectual’ reception, I focus firstly on looking, leisure and the everyday; then on the deliberate reinforcing of binaries; and lastly on the destabilising of binary oppositions. (As is the case with previous *sub*-sections, these headings appear in bold underline.)

Looking, Leisure and the Everyday

In a phrasing which I prefer over Hermes’s “mundaneness” (1995:148), McRobbie suggests that magazine use conventionally occurs within the spaces of “leisure pursuits” (1991:87). She argues that ‘leisure’ is experienced figuratively within the pages of the magazine through the brief snippets of information, the pictures, the quizzes, the ‘display’ occasioned by lithography or photogravure. Clearly, critics could begin to address the form and content of the woman’s magazine through the frame of leisure, understanding this to be associated with forms of attention and distraction that have often been undervalued. Recollect, for instance, that in the mid-1930s Benjamin undertook pathbreaking speculation into the possibility that distraction is a significant mode of modern cultural engagement. In comparison with rapt attention, he argues, it permits conceptual rupture and schism, deflecting the blinding, authoritarian allure of aura. It sets momentary pleasure alongside moments for critical reflexivity (1970:242).

A woman’s magazine typically comprises bits of this, bits of that. It is a collection of often disparate features and visual material, which is at the same time a deliberate recycling of conventional forms and ideas. It brings together often-unrelated features, images, and advertisements, even while a reader may recognise some of these as having been strategically placed in order to present apparent coherence: consider the practice of situating on either side of a feature advertisement ‘bumpers’ which promote products related to the subject matter under discussion. Further, readers may both revel in the dispersal, taking great pleasure in the diversity of leisure opportunities, and be irked by the plethora of visual and verbal information: consider having to search out the continuations of a gripping lead feature towards the end of an issue where, governed by the constraints of page space rather than aesthetic principles, it is interspersed with a conceptually distracting array of odds-and-sods.

As the good, yet still inadequate laser simulations of magazine covers and contents pages in this Chapter should convey, the very look of a magazine is a crucial factor in magazine phenomenology, and it is possible that women perceive themselves to be enjoying the metaphoric pursuit of leisure when they turn the pages of a women's magazine, to be taking pleasure in the brief contexts of 'time out' and escape often associated with magazine reading (Craik 1991) and enjoying "small treats" (Winship 1991:148). Women even refer to their enjoyment of the visually dynamic broken formats, welter of colour, white space and proliferation of images to relieve the copy. McRobbie, for her part, emphasises the dominantly visual appeal of the magazine, the interspersed articles and features with light material, the familiar layout and tone which encourage partial and uneven reading...: "The dominance of the visual level, which is maintained throughout the magazine reinforces this notion of leisure. It is to be glanced through, looked at and only finally read" (1991:90). In trying to articulate the broken and erratic readings to which women's magazines may be subjected by readers who are both readers as conventionally understood and lookers, Radner makes the point slightly differently. She claims that women's magazines "produce a thick discourse that invites repeated readings regulated by different regimes of attention" (1995:133).

One of the limitations of magazines like *Femina* and *Cosmopolitan* in their early years was the poor quality of the off-set lithography, the congested design and layout. In comparison with the contemporary titles, the images lack definition and clarity, and the page layouts are often cluttered with what appear to be rather randomly-used typefaces. Some readers panned the first issue of South African *Cosmopolitan* on account of its lack of a visually satisfying look. "Chipped off" writes: "What a disappointment! Quality and class were lacking, not so much in the articles, but in the appearance. Even the advertisements looked cheap" (May 1984:191). Looking back over early issues in the publisher's archives, I was struck by the piecemeal page layout, the rudimentary line drawings, barely coloured illustrations, the lack of density and definition in the colour reproductions, as well as the dearth of visually relieving white space. These features reinforced an impression that if the texts were all certainly glossy and colourful, they were much less design conscious titles than the *Cosmopolitan* and *Femina* of subsequent years, in which 'design' gradually became part of contemporary, urban living. The deliberately busy, even visually funky page layout of the present *Cosmopolitan*, for instance, seems intended to signify the youthful, Information Age appeal of a magazine which assumes a readership that possesses advanced (but also naturalised) competencies in information technology and that is responsive to cultural syncretism, visual babble and parodic style. *Femina*'s stand appeal derives from a reader's knowledge that the text looks classic but not conservative, a house-image that sits well with the editorial emphasis on 'the powers and pleasures of being a woman'. Jane Raphaely, publisher of both *Cosmopolitan* and *Femina*, is convinced that design and aesthetics relate to the pleasure taken by readers in magazine consumption: "I don't believe that this is superficial. Packaging is an important sensory area...the visual, and the tactile. We really should not underestimate this area of appeal. When we redesigned *Femina*, this was something we admitted" (Murray: unpublished interview).

In discussing 'look', I am aware of mounting an argument in which 'technological advancement' and 'newness' are harnessed in the service of appeal. I understand that these are the criteria on which others – Mattelart (1986) for instance – premise a critique of the facility of a modern consumer culture to elicit participation in the rituals of consumption through rhetorics of uniqueness which are in fact nothing more than cyclical, and hence infinitely deferrable rather than ever realised. Nevertheless I argue that changes in the visual and tactile aspects of magazine

well perceive such sophistication in terms of improvement and development, rather than mere superficiality. As Winship explains, if 'style' has long been dismissed as "a sugar coating that can be dispensed with by those with political 'vision' ...retailers have been discovering the importance of design in selling their products". In fact, customers respond "not simply to the quality of the product, but to the kind of packaging and to shop display and environment, all of which create the 'brand name' and an associated lifestyle" (1987:159). Accordingly, it is not daft to imagine that women may extrapolate from the improved 'look' of a text so as to imagine or conceptualise improvement in their own positions as women; or that women may be conscious of 'newness' as a repeatedly mobilised signifier, and aware that the apparently new may in fact mimic older styles and forms for effect. People's experiences of mass-mediated society are not quite as depthless or unremittingly present as some theorists of postmodernity would have it.

Indeed, as several commentators on women's magazines have observed, there is now pressure on the editorial and advertising departments of *all* titles to produce a magazine which is visually attractive, with judiciously used font styles and a sophisticated computer paintbox able to generate pleasing colour images and graphics. Traditionally, this 'visual' preponderance has exacerbated the tendency to regard women's magazines as superficial, thin, inconsequential. But as the visual design and paper quality of magazine production come to influence readers' decisions about whether or not to purchase, it could be said that the pressure towards attractiveness will have consequences for even those more obviously feminist magazines which had previously sought to mark their 'seriousness' through functional, down-to-earth production quality. (See Winship 1987:159.) As Ballaster *et al* remark of *Spare Rib*, an expressly radical magazine for British women: "*Spare Rib* moved to a glossy cover in 1985. The importance of this step for a serious and avowedly feminist magazine should not be underestimated" (1991:117). It remains to be seen whether the South African *Agenda*, whose 'editorial collective' imagines the journal's primary market to comprise community workers, students, professionals, educators and members of women's organisations, will undergo any change in appearance. At present, much seems to be made by feminists of the fact that the 'progressivity' of magazines like *Speak* and *Agenda* will not be compromised by the carrying of advertisements, and that the texts are deliberately characterised by a poor technology of relatively cheap grade paper, and black and white photographic reproduction. (See Mofokeng in Daymond and Lenta 1990.) If mainstream South African feminism is to be believed, certain kinds of pleasures (the visual, design, gloss) remain off-limits to women if they wish to imagine themselves as properly liberated. Yet both titles frequently use the personal, approachable tone and educative, informative content that originates in the glossies, and *Agenda*, certainly, very often advocates a liberal, postmodern feminism that is already familiar from women's consumer periodicals. Which titles are pioneering and which are emulating, I am inclined to ask. Further, the implications of not carrying advertising are evident in the price of *Agenda*, which costs R15.50 per issue. The editorial collective also requires that submissions present endnotes and bibliography in the Harvard Style, so that the magazine's audience is in all likelihood much less popular than the collective might wish. The title is perhaps relatively restricted in its ideal objective, stated inside the front cover, of "giving women a forum, a voice and skills to articulate their needs and interests towards transforming unequal gender relations in South Africa" (*Agenda* 28, 1996).

Clearly, I am not convinced by arguments which assert the inherent superficiality of an interest in appearance. Nor am I willing to insist that women's magazines can best be recuperated for feminist purpose by emphasising the educative function over the pleasurable. In relation to women's magazines the look of the title – comprising an at once glossy, visually-dense image bank and a dispersed range of styles and forms, as well as the kind of visual and conceptual looks

performed by the reader upon the text – are probably as important to the reading practice as the explicitly educative and informative repertoires.

Of course, critics of women's magazines often assert that looking is important to learning, claiming that it is through the very use of a repeatedly visual element, one which appears to be innocuously pleasurable, that women's magazines effect their insidious control over unsuspecting readers. In these terms, the magazines, as I've already said, are seen only to pretend to offer women leisure and relaxation while really reinforcing the infinite labour associated with being 'properly' female: self-improvement routines, beauty and body regimes, maintaining relationships, the family, the domestic environment. All of this points to 'leisure' as a category which is frequently attacked in marxist critique precisely because it has been naturalised as positive when in fact it is inextricably tied to the rise of capitalism, and to the gendered spaces which are essential to the success of capitalism as an economic and social force. Interestingly, this can be linked to McRobbie's suggestion that looking takes precedence over reading. And perhaps this is where feminist academics, especially, become uncomfortable with women's magazines: women's magazines are often seen to engage only with banal matters of 'look', appearance, and so on, and, in late or postmodernity, to be completely vectored into the surface preoccupations of the society of the spectacle. In other words, morality and human concern have been superseded by style, glamour and appearance. Yet if a woman's magazine tends to structure female experience in terms of repeated categories, there are seldom (if ever) explicit indications of reading tactics: of how, when, where, what etc a reader 'should' read. Even the familiar form of the injunction: "Get a new LOOK", "Say Yes to Red this Winter!", can work only as a persuasive constative rather than as fully-achieved performative. Neither the repressive, negative educative function envisaged for magazines by many on the left, then, nor the liberatory, information-based alternative claimed by the magazine editors, is ever completely secured. If there is a visible or even embedded collective of articles, images and typical subject matter which is designed to convey, and construct, a 'consensual' femininity, there is also a dynamic between individual articles, ads, images and an ostensibly collective female narrative. The dynamic entails processes of negotiation between reader and text, between experiences of leisure and labour. The look of women's magazines, then, like that of magazines more generally, could be said to undercut any directly educative force, whether this be positive or negative. The texts are made to mean in processes which are partial and uneven, rather than systematic, even if the habitual categories into which magazine content is organised entail a form of repetition and recapitulation that is essential to the fixing of an idea within a person's imagination. Women's reading of magazines involves a

process of scattering [which] mimics rhetorically the magazine format as a whole, which is constructed not on the model of a regulated 'flow' but in terms of a disorder that is ordered by the reader....The articles and photographs may have a preferred order, but it is so unsystematically inscribed that it is only an active reader who can recreate...some version of it. (Radner 1995:133-134).

Radner's reference to the 'active' reader in the context of relaxation reminds us that women's leisure is without a doubt complex, and contradictory, especially once the domestic space becomes invested with an added impulse towards style and decor. But her comments also suggest that it is not helpful to theorise leisure as merely passive, commoditised capacity. Leisure may entail criticism of what is, but this could also see the woman investing in the magazine as she hankers after both personal and social realignments, using the pleasurable appearance of the world represented in the attractive text as a kind of surrogate pleasure analogous to that which Radway (1984) sees for romance reading. Winship suggests, for instance, that the heightened interest in crafts and homemaking is not to be regarded as simple nostalgia, but as a sublime "surrogacy for

practices that might construct another self; another place for women" (1991:149). Craik elaborates that this represents a tactic through which "women can reconcile multiple demands by fantasising about leisure while at the same time vicariously asserting 'independence'" (1994:55).

Thus 'the everyday' context must be factored into any analysis which hopes to construct women's magazines as forums for the negotiating and imagining of contemporary femaleness. Activities such as magazine and romance reading, and television watching, cannot be conceptualised as autonomous acts beyond the demands, routines and interfaces of life more generally. And as I've said, Hermes suspects that media use is often 'meaningless' and superficial, rather than imbued with deep purpose and serious intent. Or to put this another way: media use may be routinised such that the focus on 'the text' is radically decentred "in favour of an understanding of the specific routines of the everyday [of which]...media use is a part" (Hermes 1993:493). Readers may, for example, value women's magazines *because* they have been designated by society 'meaningless', banal, escapist – and hence easy to put down and to pick up again later – and this because women are iteratively faced with the art of interruptibility which so often seems to characterise femaleness. Of course there are those critics who will have no truck with such perverse forms of female creativity. Mattelart, in her reading of women's magazines as mass deception, insists on the ideological constructedness of the term 'everyday', despite implying that a female quotidian is potentially 'rich'. "Everyday life", she muses,

[d]ay-to-day life. These phrases represent a specific idea of time within which women's social and economic role is carried out. It is in the everyday time of domestic life that the fundamental discrimination of sex roles is expressed, the separation between public and private, production and reproduction. The sphere of public interests and production is assigned to man, that of private life and reproduction to woman. The hierarchy of values finds expression through the positive value attached to masculine time (defined by action, change and history) and the negative value attached to feminine time which, for all its potential richness, is implicitly discriminated against in our society, internalised and experienced as the time of banal everyday life, repetition and monotony. (1986:7)

I grant that 'the everyday' is not a self-evident term, and that everydayness has historically been vectored into the discursive authority of constraining binaries. But as my preceding discussion should indicate, I remain sceptical of Mattelart's essentialising: this despite my belief that the appeal of women's magazines may have something to do with women's perceptions that the form suits the patterns and breaks, the turns and re-turns, characteristic of their experience. Dramatically simplifying matters: the regularity of the women's magazine genre, and indeed of its categories, is something which many women seem to value as a constant structure in their lives. Paradoxically, this constancy seems to be appreciated sometimes for the illusory break and difference which it occasions in an habitual routine, and sometimes for the pattern of normality and continuity which it is able to embody: life going on – thank goodness – as usual. This agrees with Hermes's argument that despite its apparent fragmentation and "seeming irrationality, everyday life consists of ritualized structures of perceptions and expectations" which have "the capacity to naturalize and stabilize" (1993:494). Once again, then, we meet a version of a difficult dynamic in which shifting values must be granted to fragmentation and coherence, to liberation and constraint.

Extrapolating from De Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), I am given to argue that if the reading of women's magazines, like reading more generally, necessarily proceeds through conventions of language and even generic form, it remains something unconventional, opaque, only reluctantly susceptible to rules. This creativity within boundaries – a dynamic of liberation and constraint – is well-illustrated if we consider the tensions implicit in eliciting personal responses in the form of letters or articles, and then in shaping the forms which these might take. I have raised these matters already in discussing responses to my letter in

Cosmopolitan. In *True Love*'s "Your Turn", for instance, the regular endpiece written by a reader, the accompanying brief announces that this

is your chance to have your say! Whether it's something funny, topical or controversial – send not more than 800 words to *True Love/Your Turn*, P O Box 784696, Sandton, 2146. Articles published will receive R120. Please include a good close-up photograph of yourself. We reserve the right to edit copy. The opinions expressed in this column are not necessarily those held by the magazine. Unfortunately, we cannot send personal replies, nor can we print all letters received. (*True Love* January 1997:120)

Let me expand upon this dynamic of liberation and constraint by referring to *Cosmopolitan* magazine. *Cosmopolitan* franchises are extensive: they are held in Australia, Argentina, Brazil, Britain, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Holland, Hong Kong, India, Italy, Japan, Portugal, Russia, South Africa, Spain, Taipei and Turkey. All the local editions are required to market the image of the title as a 'global brand' – in several instances, this means using material syndicated from another *Cosmopolitan* international edition: South African *Cosmo*'s use of Irma Kurtz's advice column from British *Cosmo*, for example. But they also rework the international ('cosmopolitan') formula of a pre-eminently American, yet increasingly transnational image of a naturalised consumer 'modernity' to suit the needs and demands of a particular country's readership. Pertinent, here, is an editorial of the early South African *Cosmopolitan*, in which editor Jane Raphaely acknowledges both the reader who declares "I love *Cosmo* because sooner or later I know it's going to get around to *my* problem", and the reader who is resentful of the fact that in its infancy the magazine carried reruns of Irma Kurtz and Tom Crabtree advice from old editions of British *Cosmo*. The writer of a letter given the heading "AGONY, NO ECSTASY" remarks: "Surely there are thousands of people in South Africa whose problems need urgent attention" (August 1984:191). This reader is not challenging the potential usefulness of the advice column as a genre: indeed, she values it. But she maintains that while some advice of a transnational provenance might be helpful or interesting to all women on account of their gendered similarity, and while South African women could no doubt learn from their foreign counterparts, it is misguided to anticipate that specifically South African problems can adequately be addressed by turning solely to the decontextualised international example. In shaping her editorial response, Raphaely acknowledges readers' persistent and, she admits, valid resentment at having to read reruns of

some of the old Kurtz and Crabtree advice which we have been reprinting. Your excellent recall of their columns only proves how memorable and marvellous they both are. But...we felt that the infinitely larger audience of the South African edition should be introduced to the 'heart surgeons' via some of their classic columns and counsel.

But we are sympathetic to the withdrawal pangs of the addicts so from this issue onwards both columns contain only new insights and advice. And in the case of our Agony Aunt each column also contains at least one reply which is a direct response to all those letters which are pouring into our offices....We are analysing and filing your requests and queries. And...you will find the answers in these pages. *Cosmopolitan* is the patent proof that anyone who doesn't like their [*sic*] script can change it! (*Cosmopolitan* August 1984:4)

Evidently, there continue to be gate-keeping principles in operation here. The magazine's production team will 'allow' one small, locally-specific voice, and it presents the magazine as containing the solutions to problems, when it could be argued that women's magazines actually 'contain' such problems by claiming the value of personal solutions rather than effecting structural, institutional change. Also, readers are constituted as the source of so much data to be analysed and filed in 'the magazine's' quest for complete knowledge of and power over its target audience. Similarly, one might smirk at the metaphor of addiction through which Raphaely *chooses* to interpret a range of readers' responses which in fact do not, on the page, announce themselves thus. But if it is not evident in the particular letters to which Raphaely is responding, the trope of addiction *is* deployed by many readers to explain their 'use' (and 'abuse'?) of the

women's magazine form. I met this with some unease in the responses to my own letter asking for correspondence about women's magazines. I was uncomfortable with this justification, unable to cast off a pious moral-cultural censoriousness; a tendency to read metaphor empirically. However, I have come to consider that 'addiction' is perhaps expressive of the paradoxically fleeting, transitory, romanticised, yet unrelentingly repetitive kinds of knowledges and pleasures characteristic of much mass-mediated experience. And that the trope inevitably sits awkwardly in relation to many intellectuals' 'addiction' to totalising, positivistic knowledge and clearly demarcated disciplinary bounds.

An equally awkward issue, for me, has been the matter of resistance. At times in conducting my research, I have wanted to argue that if I had resisted the meanings which were said to be disseminated by the capitalist Culture Industry, surely other women were capable of resisting too? Such a recognition seemed to rebut the negatively diagnostic reading of women as victims of the messages contained in consumer culture. 'Resistance' seemed to stress the likelihood that women's magazines, while being products of Capital, were not automatically successful in presenting their female readers with a prescriptive experiential narrative. Yet resistance has come to seem but one possible form of response among many, and to claim space for women's agency solely by arguing that they unilaterally *resist* the meanings carried *in* women's magazines is not to make sense of women's ambivalent, confused and/or fantasised investments in the practice of reading these cultural forms. I return in greater detail to the problematic category of the resistant in my discussion of shopping malls in Chapter 3.

The problems with Raphaely's comments notwithstanding, and despite an editor's attempt to marshall differences through tactics of reasonableness, accommodation and the channelling of human diversity into the ciphers of market research, it must be granted that when it comes to the making and breaking of rules, and the taking of pleasure in rhetoric and practice, readers are not easily dictated to or duped (doped). They respond repeatedly and quirkily: in the form of letters to the editor, telephone calls to individual journalists in the magazine's employ, e-mail, and voice-mail, as well as through less visible, less easily-retrievable forms of informal conversation, and through the moments of endorsement, reconsideration and equivocation that make up actual moments of reading. Thus even through structural systems, like letters pages, which deliberately solicit interaction between reader and text, and in which readers, whether as readers and/or writers, momentarily submit to the strictures of the structure in order to express their ideas, experiences and beliefs, readers actively rework the rules through which magazine discourse is necessarily managed. If this is the magazine's mimicking of the comparatively liberal, pluralist form of governance associated with democracy and modernity, I can but reiterate that such governance entails forms of human regulation which are not insistently, necessarily or coherently experienced by women as alienating.

Several critics (notably Hermes 1995) remark that women enjoy mocking and verbally parodying the conventions of the magazine form: the register of authoritative intimacy, for instance, or the use of romantic figures of speech premised on highly stylised gender relations, or the seasonal advocacy of new looks in clothing and make-up, or the elusive search for 'quick fix' female sexual fulfilment. (Where exactly – exactly – is that 'g-spot'?) In other words, women derive pleasure from the content and images in ways that were not intended. Such mockery and tongue-in-cheek meaning-making may even be evident in the pages of the magazine, as is the case with this example from the first South African issue of *Cosmopolitan*: "Circe is writing our horoscopes....Incidentally, her data differ from those given by other astrologers and we say she's the only one who got it right" (March 1984:4). Within this critical framework, letters pages and advice columns are especially good examples of creative reader-use. They may offer what some

readers on some occasions accept to be useful tactics and pointers, but readers may on other occasions ridicule both the reader's problem, and/or the advisor's reply: the reader's letter might be mocked for the banality of the problem it conveys, or for its typicality ("Oh come *on*: surely she should know the answer to that old problem by now!"); the reply might be perceived as being too pat, or too complex, or too out of touch with the letter writer's implicit reality ("Get real – how's she supposed to make anything out of that?"). Or readers may sigh with vicariously-derived relief that the sheer awfulness of some reader's situation is not their own ("Shame, how terrible. Or how embarrassing. Imagine having to go through *that*?"). Readers may also enjoy the thrill of working through someone else's problems, imagining possible solutions ("I wonder what I would do if...?"). The letters and advice pages may function, then, as much in terms of the spectacular, of the melodramatic, gossip-oriented interest in other people's lives, as in terms of seriously educative potential. Further, the actual use to which even overtly exaggerated, heroic registers and images are put may involve "small and not highly significant pleasures...the experience of which may, for example, be reassuring, an unnameable pleasure rather than a liberating event" (Hermes 1995:148). Thus readers' letters provide moments in which the discourses enunciative of the female are variously constructed and deconstructed, consumed and produced. They are not simply educative texts, even when the researcher is willing to consider the education as on occasions being useful, rather than insistently repressive. Once again it is Hermes's observations which are appropriate here, although I do not completely subscribe to the categorising – women's gossip magazines – with which she works. She explains that it

is not always perfectly clear whether one is dealing with irony, with unwitting forms of camp, [with melodrama] or with simply making fun. To make such distinctions based on ...[a] few quotations...would be risky. Suffice it to say that reading [women's]...magazines, for all readers, is to some degree shot through with reservations about their truthfulness, with the fun of speculation and with the pleasure of gaining 'forbidden' knowledge both in the sense of scandal and in the sense of partaking in low and almost illegitimate culture. [Even] when reading seriously we may experience the added pleasure of moral indignation and an equally moral sense of connectedness, while reading ironically bars others from questioning our taste: we can enjoy what is deemed 'bad' without enabling others to hold us responsible for what we read. (1995:136)

Deliberate Reinforcement of Binaries

As I have shown in this Chapter, critics who consider women's magazines to be dubious forms typically refer to them as naturalising through repetition a number of repressive binaries, in which the first term is privileged over 'the other'. (I do not chart the genealogy of such analysis, but it includes die-hard oppositional truisms such as masculine/feminine; public/private; hard/soft; world/home; political/personal; work/leisure; production/ consumption; earning/spending; strength/nurturing; self/selflessness; head/heart, and mind/ emotions.) For the primarily negative critic, through the obsessive use of such polarities women's magazines as a genre work to perpetuate the inflexible conceptual and experiential structures that characterise gendered relations under capitalism, and they popularise a consensual totality designated Woman, the Female, and Femininity.

Yet there are other ways of looking at this. One way of recuperating women's magazines as texts illustrative of struggle over contemporary gendered identity is to allow that their reinforcement of binaries may in the context of women's leisure be experienced positively and pleasurably, notwithstanding the limitations associated with binaristic thought. For example, there might be

positive aspects to the women's magazine's insistent identification of femininity with the 'personal', the 'individual', and the 'private'. Evidently, the women's magazine, in privileging what it defines as emotional, sexual and personal issues and in specifying that these areas are women's priority and

primary concern, puts women at the centre of all experience. Men exist only at the margins of this world, most strikingly in the fashion-plate where they usually appear only in the background or at the side of the picture admiring the self-confident woman who strides towards the camera. Men are, of course, a constant reference point; much of women's activity, as defined by the magazine, is directed toward 'humanising', modifying, responding suitably to men's anti-social behaviour. But, in so doing, the magazine reverses the conventional hierarchy of gendered subjects in cultural representations – masculinity functions as the 'not-feminine', the 'other' of woman, whether it is represented as dangerous or familiar. The women's magazine, like the romantic fiction so central to its formation, converts the public/private divide, habitually used to repress women, into an asset. (1991:175)

This quotation is drawn from none other than Ballaster *et al*, whose main concern is to construct the women's magazine as a fatally compromised form. *This* voice is not often allowed to speak in the editorial constraints of their volume's '*et al*'. But it is a provocative articulation of a persuasive case for women's magazines as staging a femaleness premised on a valuable personal and private dimension which has habitually been denigrated by 'society at large'. The polarities are inflected with the power of dissention, rather than conveying passive assent.

Interesting cases may therefore be made for an over-emphasis on things female. A rethinking of Ann Treneman's argument is appropriate here, although her subject matter is the women's pages of newspapers and not the women's magazine. Treneman discusses the schizophrenic juxtaposition of trivial, 'cult' of femininity content (pieces on royalty, beauty, the entertainment world – all of which simply affirm the middle class) as against 'resource' content, which she describes as being "non-traditional articles which, while not revolutionary, challenge the middle-class status quo in a variety of ways" (1990:185). She uses the labels 'cult' content and 'resource' content as opposites. In my opinion, however, it is impossible to determine with any accuracy what comprises 'cult' and what 'resource'. If respondents to my letter in *Cosmopolitan* indicated that they valued – took emotional and intellectual pleasure in – the *information* carried in women's magazines, many repeatedly crossed the categories that we conventionally construct as informative and emotional, or news and trivia, or pleasure and labour, or propriety and the improper, making resourceful use of a cult of femininity.

Consider, for example, that if one aspect of *Cosmopolitan*'s stand-appeal has been built on providing an important forum for women's sexual education, the brand identity has also been signified through a sensationally declarative sexuality. Sex, especially the heterosexuality which remains the parameter of many women's experience, has featured as a marker of the leisure and pleasure which the magazine imagines as constitutive of the liberal-minded, contemporary, 'cosmopolitan' young woman. Sexual pleasure is her right, as much as is sexual information. Early issues of South African *Cosmopolitan* carried trailblazing features on vibrators, as well as on male bodies presented for the lingering female gaze. "'JA of Durban'" writes: "I love your 'Hunk of the Month' idea but think it's downright mean to print such small pictures. Why not a full-page, or even occasionally a centre spread? You are spot on: women do like to look at men. I do – in the street, on the beach, at sports events, *everywhere*" (July 1984:206). This overt announcement of sexual pleasure continues to be crucial to the formula. As part of its holiday-season fun, for instance, the December 1996 issue featured a collection of nude South African men. That this was advertised as a *sealed*, special insert (a gift-wrapped package) points to the sensationalism that critics of *Cosmopolitan* repeatedly object to; and it replays all the assumptions concerning a naturalised heterosexuality in terms of which the magazine continues to present the female norm. Similarly, both *Elle* and *Cosmopolitan* in early 1997 attempted to make a statement concerning their open-mindedness by being willing to flight sexually-explicit jeans advertisements which would almost certainly never appear in some of the other women's magazine titles. The one advertisement featured an explicit full-frontal photograph of a male nude; the other comprised line drawings of various sexual positions derived from the *KamaSutra*

and illustrating possibilities for 'women on top'. Yet while such strategies are economically motivated, they also represent an acknowledgement that women are interested in sex, in nudity, and not only in romantic love, supposedly the staple of female investments in relationships. Many readers' very real pleasure in the *Cosmopolitan* pictures – or their displeasure at the prudish cover-up which was passed off as nudity – cannot simply be theorised in terms of a normative regulating of women's sexual desire. There is an undeniable reversal of authority involved: women are not merely the objects of another's, usually male, gaze; their pleasures are also actively implicated in scopic fantasy.

To say as much is to admit that human beings are contradictory and complex; they may fashion aspects of their subjectivity from images which they may not consciously, or completely, endorse. In other words, a theory adequate to the analysis of women's magazines as product and reading process would need to make space for irrationality, confusion, illogicality, fantasy and the like, rather than insisting on the utilitarian efficacy of Capital in targeting members of an audience and persuading them of the rightness of a dominant ideology.

While the subject of his inquiry is a contemporary consumer culture which ramifies beyond women's magazines, Barry Richards, for instance, offers the challenging idea that

the pleasures of popular culture are at their strongest and best when they confirm in us our sense of belonging to an inclusive social order. Despite the constraint and disappointment necessarily involved in this, the reconciliation with authority which it brings is vital for the containment of feelings about loss, destructiveness and death with which we are continually struggling. (1994:162)

I will not remain long with Richards in my discussion of women's magazines, but his volume valuably attempts to psychoanalyse people's (especially *male*) enjoyment of cultural forms like football, cars, pop music, and smoking as the *pleasurable disciplining* of delight. It is novel, in sympathetic appraisals of popular culture, for a researcher to base the analysis on a central tension in which a disciplinary force is envisaged to occur not against an imagined democratic, life-enhancing function, but in relation to it. At times, Richards does lean towards an either/or argument which is not easily reconciled with my own both/and preference: instead of finding in popular culture "overwhelming evidence of psychosocial fragmentation", he discerns "recurrent tendencies towards integration, reparation and deeply social commitment" (1994:151). Nevertheless his claim that consumer culture is *usefully* psychically conservative has interesting resonances. As Richards remarks rather dryly, we "may regret that the provision of symbolic materials for dramatising the work of psychic integration is in the hands of the marketeers, and so is tied to the pursuit of profits and the expansion of markets, but that cannot lead us to prejudice in full the psychic functions which those materials may fulfil for many people" (1994:154). The repeatedly individualised content and urge to psychologised self-sufficiency in the advice columns and letters pages of women's magazines, for instance, may attest to a "growing emotional resourcefulness in the culture at large" (Richards 1994:154), rather than to an enduring female 'immaturity' that remains persistently in need of counselling and emotional welfare against disintegration. Similarly, whatever the impossibly fictive nature of a global community of women, some readers of women's magazines enjoy the feeling that these texts put them 'in touch' with otherwise unreachable women: they recognise in women's magazines the comforting familiarity of their own female experiences even as this realm is haphazardly defamiliarised in relation to female difference or even, on occasions, startlingly represented to them as a female banal. While sometimes feeling restrained by typically female areas of content, or angered by 'exploitative' images, women might also garner reassurance and even enjoyment from the discourses of more traditional femaleness circulated in the text. They might believe that women's magazines offer them apparently secure conceptual and behavioural schemas – 'normality' – in

relation to which they may negotiate their own identities. (I have already made a related observation in discussing the everyday context in which women's magazines tend to be read.) Ballaster *et al* (1991) acknowledge (along with Winship [1991] and Craik [1994]), that popular perceptions of femaleness might entail pleasurable use of those very practices which intellectually-theorised understandings of gender would prefer to label conservative, regressive, co-opted. Make-up, beauty rituals, gossip, fashion, childcare, any number of home-making crafts...it is possible to offer a sympathetic rather than dismissive reading of such pursuits. The implication is that the repeated categorising of experience in and by women's magazines enables women to manage the contradictions habitually associated with femaleness. The categories demonstrate and assert the value of emotions, the personal, the self, the home – so-called micro issues – in the face of society's tendency to value macro issues such as politics, business, and economics. I have raised such matters in more anecdotal fashion in an earlier discussion of Hogarth, Mandela and Khanyi Dhlomo-Mkhize.

Recollect, here, that in justifying my sample of magazine titles earlier in this Chapter I referred to my having deliberately selected examples from women's *glossies* in keeping with my desire to construct women's magazines as texts which do not insistently narrate a repressive Female Story but struggle to manage and to extend the meanings currently associated with being female. I was not interested in those women's magazine titles (*Essentials*, say, or *Woman's Value*) which, despite offering a female consumer the pleasure of 'added value' through regular samples and pattern-pullouts, saw their brief as recycling primarily traditional areas of female interest and expertise. Nor was I interested in those magazines devised exclusively in terms of single-interest traditionally 'female' categories such as homemaking, childcare, or cookery (*Your Family*, for instance). Within the titles used for my sample, more visibly than within texts like *Essentials*, I thought myself more likely to have access to the informed, contemporary discourses in terms of which South African women of at least liberal inclination might imagine their various femalenesses. Yet if the argument which I have just staged concerning the psychically regenerative function of apparently conservative subject matters and forms has any validity, I must recognise that titles like *Your Family* and *Essentials* also facilitate the management of change and the negotiation of female identity. Here is a fairly simplistic example: the Afrikaans title *Rooi Rose* "has even attracted English readers for the recipes and patterns, because no-one does it quite like the boere tannies" (Editor Joan Kruger, cited in Bierbaum 1995:61). Similarly, in a contemporary South Africa characterised by social and political volatility, women's magazines may provide readers with something resembling a cultural familiar – even as they slowly effect shifts in what counts as 'normal' by using a range of images and covering a range of topics. *Rooi Rose*'s editor, by way of example, foresees for this magazine a strong future in providing Afrikaans readers "with a kind of psychological homeland, one that can replace the tribal aspirations that preceded the elections" (Bierbaum 1995:61). The femalenesses displayed in women's magazines, then, may variously help to maintain and to shift those forms of femininity that are more widely considered to be only conservative. They allow readers to manage change in ways that accommodate both past and present claims upon women's responsibility as sources of cultural (and even national) stability.

Interesting in this respect is Hermes's research, which illustrates that readers use the conventional women's magazine categories to structure what is necessarily a femaleness always-in-process. For Hermes, reading women's magazines

and especially collecting recipes, knitting patterns and advice booklets, is a way of defending boundaries to one's identity. Identities are never stable or fixed..., they need continuing renewal. Being a housewife or being a mother... [sometimes] involves claiming access to specific, semi-expert knowledges (cooking, health care, knitting) just as those who compile folders with reviews, or with

ideas of where to go in foreign cities (such as are offered by the glossy magazines), maintain an identity of a cultured person. Evidently the pleasure is more in the collecting, in the doing, than in using a collection. Hence quite a number of collections of magazines or magazine cuttings did not last long. (1995:92)

Her remarks can be extended, I think, to imply that even when readers do not literally clip sections from a women's magazine, they figuratively extract material that is pertinent at particular moments in their lives, and in various ways. They are not under pressure to retain this visual or verbal information: paradoxically because it is both inconsequential *and* because they are secure in the knowledge that the women's magazine genre constantly recycles all of these forms of information should they ever 'need' or 'want' them again. The mental and/or physical actions of reading and/or cutting out certain sections of text are ways in which women feel themselves actively to be negotiating moments in the formation of ongoing subjectivity. They may not practice this all the time, and their belief in what they are doing may be intermittent, but they at some points consider it to be a worthwhile form of pleasure and learning.

Crossing of Binary Oppositions

However quirky it may seem, women's magazines may be valued not solely for containing and managing women's contemporary experience through the structures of binary opposition: readers may also perceive them to transgress or refashion experiential and conceptual boundaries. This is a position permitted me by the structure of Radner's 'both/and' logic, in terms of which women's magazines are best understood as paradoxical cultural forms and related practices in which discourses of control work alongside those of liberation (1995).

While women may at times value the privileging and prioritising in the magazine text of what has widely been rejected by theorists as a schematic, stereotypical and stigmatised femaleness, at other moments (or, if I properly follow the both/and logic, at one and the same moment), they might not fundamentally accept these binaries as inherently authoritative experiential co-ordinates. That is to say, if the right hand side of the polarity – home, emotions, heart... – is perhaps valued by women, it is not therefore considered adequate as a structuring device of female identity or behaviour. For many women, even a cursory glance at the binaries is likely to indicate that the poles cannot, mutually exclusively, delimit human experience. Repeated crossings of categories occur, whether actually or conceptually. While a female reader may recognise herself in some of the qualities or locations, there is no necessary connection between the multiform conditions of women and beauty, domesticity, intuition and so on. Useful here is a quotation from Stuart Hall's introduction to David Morley's research into family television watching: "We are all in our heads different audiences at once". So we "have the capacity to deploy different levels and modes of attention, to mobilise different competencies in our viewing. At different times of the day, for different family members, different patterns of viewing have different 'salience'" (Hall 1986:10). Such a recognition allows that there is no single critical position absolutely descriptive of the relationship which might exist between members of an audience, a cultural text and a cultural process; and that no neat correspondences need exist between a person's various images of self and the self as the 'target' of a cultural medium. This position is very different from the still-in-evidence conviction that women's magazines, and their readers, are by definition contained by stereotype.

For my part, if I have been willing to make a case for the *value* of the psychic conservation that may for some women on some occasions be associated with women's magazines, I am not convinced that either women's magazine discourses, or readers' experiences of these discourses, are constantly and coherently premised on an *opposition* between private and public. It repeatedly

strikes me as curious that women's magazines have been cited by critics as responsible for the *negative* reinforcing of stereotypes, rather than as sites which bring to the fore the contradictory meanings and practices associated with being female. Yes, the implied community of readers for such texts as the personality interview *is* imagined in terms of 'the female', but precisely what constitutes the female has always been open to contestation, and is increasingly amorphous, involving not only conceptual and experiential boundary crossings into terrains previously constructed as masculine, but assumptions about the legitimacy of interests which draw on public as well as private. So-called 'women's interests', then, if they are not held *generally* to include 'male' orientations towards cars and mechanical matters, are more than likely to include sophisticated acknowledgement of public, political and business issues. If the basic implied community of readers for women's magazines is female, that femaleness is increasingly available in women's magazines as diversity and difference. It is hardly consensual, but a site of struggle, of debate, of contestation over meanings.

In relation to the representation and construction by women's magazines' of domains of private and public, Radner argues cogently that the women's

magazine, unlike the political diatribe, reflects the woman's struggle on a daily basis with the taken-for-grantedness of her existence.... Women's magazines, and feminine culture, displace the political from its position as part of a metacritical discourse onto the minute decisions of a contingent day-to-day practice in which absolute categories cannot be maintained from moment to moment. Feminine culture emphasizes a process of investment and return, of negotiation, in which the value of a given articulation is always measured against its costs. (1995:178)

Thus in responding to women's magazines I draw not on antithetical modes of closure or openness, repression or liberation. As I have said, even such an heroic idiom might not be appropriate to the small, ephemeral meanings that readers often attribute to women's magazines. The issue is one of emphasis. Indeed, if we return to Pleasance's article on magazines and the negotiation of femininity we rediscover an important aspect of her purpose: to challenge the tendency within the fields of both cultural study and feminism to set critical frameworks of openness or closure *against* "each other, the one supposedly refuting or undercutting the other". She wants to consider "if anything can be gained by holding the contradictions between the two frameworks together, since within my own work their polarization has left me with an impossible choice between two apparently contradictory accounts of how culture works" (1991:69-70). Holding together contradiction so as to negotiate what is otherwise an impossible choice: this seems an excellent model for the critical reading and researching of women's magazines, and intersects with Radner's claims for the logic of a culture which emphasises the feminine: "the logic of a conflicted overdetermined practice in which answers are and/and" rather than either/or (1995:179).

Thus instead of automatically dismissing women's magazines (as instances of the Culture Industry's tendency to trade in monolithically repressive stupefaction masquerading as Enlightenment), *or* unconditionally celebrating them (as treasure troves of female choice), it seems academically legitimate to grant serious attention to tensions and contradictions within and around the discourses of women's magazines in relation to the meaning of gender in contemporary societies. The genre of the women's magazine can bear immense hermeneutical weight, but not if it is considered to be a mega-monolith. (South African) women's magazines, albeit with degrees of difference, could be seen as cultural forms in which (local) women repeatedly, and with varying modes of attention, negotiate, fantasise about and reflect on the realities of their own and other people's lives. For the academic feminist, in particular, it is worth considering that the so-called failure of a diffusely heterogeneous women's magazine discourse to provide a teleological rigour is precisely its value. Women's magazines as permeable

discursive structures recirculate images and ideas, unmooring them from their 'original' contexts, and bring the feminine into contact with the feminist. They produce a kind of multiplication that is antithetical to a monoglossic, univocal Feminism. Indeed, if the contemporary women's magazine embodies the possibilities of multiple femaleness that became feasible only through the efforts of a more coherently oppositional early feminism, it remains the case that the genre is not habitually recognised as circulating legitimate female narratives. Yet as Radner stresses, one paradox of consumer culture is that

perhaps the women's magazine does a better job of speaking for women, of empowering their voices, than does the feminist scholar who has set this as her task. I am not suggesting that we see women's magazines as some emancipatory institution, as the site of an authentic resistance to the patriarchal norm. Certainly, the reproduction of femininity as a social category, in which the women's magazine participates as one of its primary functions, serves to reserve the position of occulted class to a majority that might otherwise constitute the dominant class as a heterogeneity of voices. Thus the women in this class pay dearly for their privileges: the price, their dependency. Rather, I would like to suggest that as feminists we might learn from the women's magazine as a pedagogical model, one that meanders yet remains contained, that offers information within a heteroglossia of narratives rather than from a univocal position, that accumulates rather than replaces, that permits contradiction and fragmentation, that offers choice rather than conversion as its message. (1995:135)

Overall, my own critical position in this Chapter remains a difficult one, in that I am compelled to confront what are often elusive, and even intransigent relationships between South African magazine texts and readers, between one magazine title and another, between any single title and the broader genre of something called 'the women's magazine', and between various contexts of production and consumption. Yet I am convinced that no serious research into women's magazines can steamroll such problems by merely insisting on the coherent conceptual closure that is conventionally considered to be the mark of 'academic authority'. The unsettling truth of the matter – and here follows an admission with intriguing consequences for the theorising of academic desire – is that I remain ambivalently implicated in the reading(s) and researching(s) of women's magazines, and that these are themselves cultural forms which may be used to support apparently irreconcilable critical positions. As Chapter 3 makes evident, the same pertains to the convoluted intellectual and emotional investments which I make in the perplexing cultural form of the shopping mall.

Notes to Chapter Two

1. While their disciplinary affiliations and ideological positions are not identical, Craik (1994), Ferguson (1978 and 1983), Friedan (1976), Fuss (1992), Hermes (1993 and 1995), Illouz (1991), Lopate (1978), McClintock (1978), McCracken (1993 and 1996), McRobbie (1991), Mattelart (1986), Onwurah (1987), Pleasance (1991), Radner (1994), Tuchman (1978), White (1970), Wilbraham (1996 and 1997), Winship (1987) and Wolf (1990) are the main critics I have been able to unearth on the subject of women's magazines as a genre, or on aspects of the genre. The list is curiously short when one considers the range and reach of women's magazines.
2. Although I will not spend time on this here, the view which holds that women's magazines are manipulative vehicles of the Culture Industry might also draw attention to other particularly visible examples of generic continuity. Horoscopes, for instance, once trashy and down-market, have been recuperated by publishers in the service of women's search for a meaningful understanding of 'life'. Similarly, while the illustrated "interview or article about a personality", often a star, has become a staple feature format in popular print and televisual journalism, it predominates in women's magazines because this is a genre concerned to construct the *female* individual and 'the self' as deeply meaningful entities with personal truths that need to be uncovered and understood (Ballaster *et al* 1991:119).
3. Although her work is not uncontroversial, Fuss (1992) identifies a fundamental contradiction in the *homospectatorially* sexualised mode of address in the photographic codes crucial to women's magazines as mass-mediated texts addressed to *women*. Significantly, though, she does not take this as fuel for any ideological torchbearing; she makes a complicated psychoanalytic case for the images in women's magazines as implicated in women's negotiation of their female subjectivities.
4. It is worth observing that the market for South African men's magazines is also currently undergoing substantial revision. Pricey internationals aside – *GQ*, *Arena* and *Esquire* – South African men have hardly been spoilt for choice. *Big Blue*, a youthful male culture magazine of the mid-1980s was shortlived, possibly on account of an inability to attract sufficient advertising interest. The convention, established by *Cosmopolitan* and imitated by *Elle*, has been to include an annual or bi-annual male supplement with the women's title, possibly testing the waters. The longstanding *Scope*, widely if not exclusively regarded as a male magazine on account of its soft-focus pornographic images of women and its hard-core investigative coverage of news and violence, folded in 1995 in the wake of a dwindling readership attributable in part to the opening up of the South African magazine market to 'beaver' or 'girlie' titles such as *Hustler* and *Penthouse*. And these magazines, in their turn, have experienced a fall in readership as the thrill of the newly exposed has worn off. Instead, if there remains a tendency to address a male magazine readership primarily in terms of the individual's hobby or leisure interests, the recent past has seen the launch of men's magazines such as *Directions* (1996), which is a reconceptualisation of the earlier *Big Blue* initiative, and a local version of the internationally successful *Men's Health* (1997). These resemble women's magazines in having an editorial emphasis which trades in a self-consciously chimerical 'total masculinity'. The same is true even of the newest title *SportsLife*, with an implied black male readership.
5. Fenster argues that *Marie Claire* is targeting women who are 'quality-gear'd': they "buy the best quality for the best money they can afford, whether they live in Sandton or Soweto. That's where *Marie Claire*'s combination of aspirational quality and practical information

is an advantage" (1997:16). A case is also being made for the launch of *Marie Claire* as appropriate to South Africa's re-entry into the international arena. The magazine's mission statement refers to "building the budding internationalism in South African women's magazines", with the title trying to balance "local and international fashion and features" (Farquar 1997a:8)

6. The example cited is *Ebony South Africa* a magazine for black readers which is "totally missing the mark by reporting on South African issues and affairs from a US perspective" (Farquar 1997a:8). Similar criticisms seem to be implied, however, about new local editions of foreign women's magazine titles such as *Elle* and *Marie Claire*.
7. In her essay on *Elle Decoration*, Barbara Usherwood argues that far from simply enforcing inappropriate 'foreign' methods and ideas on 'locals', transnational publishing projects make use of "innovative 'global-but-local marketing strategies'" (1997:178). The partnership arrangement – a joint venture between an international and a local publishing company – allows publishers to "maximise the advantages of transnational publishing whilst being sensitive to the particular character of local", national markets (Usherwood 1997:181). The success of *Cosmopolitan* has, over the years, fostered an interest in securing local rights to overseas titles, something which is presently being realised in the form of South African versions of titles such as *Elle*, *Marie Claire*, *Men's Health* and *House and Garden*.
8. While men remain dominant in ownership and management in South African media, Raphaely's success announces her as a dramatic exception and projective, aspirational figure. This is not to imply, however, that a woman will *necessarily* serve women's interests better than a man. Besides several women's titles, Raphaely is also behind Associated Magazines' *House and Leisure*, a multiple award-winning South African decor and living magazine.
9. I must admit to not having pursued this, but *True Love* is an even more dramatic instance of re-invention: I belatedly discovered that *True Love* was originally a title for black South African *men*. Laden (no date a) implies that the magazine was initially intended as a 'sexy read' for migrant workers on the mines of the Witwatersrand.
10. Ang and Radway tend to analyse readers' responses by focussing on specific text-sorts or genres; in comparison, Morley, despite his generic interest in television as a form of media, prefers a method which concentrates not on text but on media technology and the contextual *situatedness* of everyday media use.
11. If frequency of citation by researchers working in similar areas is anything to go by, Pleasance's short article, with its persuasive refusal of self-aggrandising theoretical fireworks, appears to be little-known.

CHAPTER THREE

An Academic Milling Around 'the Mall': (de)Constructing Cultural Knowledge

Within the fiction of a late-twentieth-century collective unconscious, 'the shopping mall' in its many guises is probably a naturalised institution. In this Chapter, all I attempt is to mill around 'the mall' in a South African context that is inevitably inflected with the international. Overall, I hope to grant 'the mall' a more unusual, even contested character than tends to be recognised within the spaces of either everyday conversation or academic critique, at once defamiliarising a popular phenomenon, and making the mall location more familiar within the spaces of the university.

Shopping malls are widely understood to be emblematic of the material consumption characteristic of late-twentieth-century urban life. Mall proliferation is such that some write of "the malling of America" (Kowinski 1986 and 1992), and the growth in number and often in magnitude of malls, along with the metapsychological effects of privatisation and dislocation with which they are thought to be associated, is taken by some to render them symptomatic of a postmodern condition. Douglas Tallack, for instance, suggests that "malls have become...the sites of the pre-history of post-modernity" (1991:137). Allowing that 'pre's' and 'post's' are neither synchronously experienced nor conceptualised by all people, perhaps it is enough to remark at this point that the shopping mall is considered by many in architecture and allied disciplines to be an exemplary model of modernity: a built form along similarly representative lines as the English terrace house of the eighteenth-century, the nineteenth-century Parisian department store, and the skyscraper of late-nineteenth-century America. As Witold Rybczynski observes in explaining the term 'exemplary model': "in free-market societies new ideas about how to organise the urban environment are frequently introduced not by city planners or architects but by individual business people in the private sector. If these ideas are popular with the public, they become...exemplary models, and go on to be widely imitated" (1994: 52).

In the twentieth century, 'the mall' is a particularly prominent and pervasive North American retail form. By the end of 1992, there were nearly 39 000 shopping malls in the USA, and North American cultural commentary is replete with arguments concerning the site deserving of the label 'the first', 'the original' mall. (As my discussion of several South African mall locations will subsequently suggest, the rhetoric of pre-eminence is tied not only to the perception of malls as economic generators, but to the search for cultural-political authority by individual developers, and particular geographic areas.) The first North American mall might be the Country Club Plaza in Kansas City (1925): as Joan Didion remarks, the developer J.C. Nichols "is referred to with ritual frequency in the literature of shopping centers" as the "'father of the center as we know it'" (1979:185). It might be the Southdale Center in Edina, Minnesota, built in 1956 and considered by some to be "the first of the malls as such" (Tallack 1991:137). There were also, however, some other early centres, notably Roland Park in Baltimore (1907), Highland Park Shopping Village in Dallas (1931), and River Oaks in Houston (1937) (Didion 1979:185). Instead of pursuing arguments about 'origins' in relation to North American malls, however, I must allow refractions of national, geographical boundaries and the dispersal of lineages, since 'the mall' spills over attempts at both spatial and temporal definition. Victor Gruen, for example, modelled "the first covered mall in the United States, Southdale Center in Edina, Minnesota, on covered pedestrian arcades, especially the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele in Milan. [And the] large department stores of Europe were in turn modeled on the garden city in such idealizations as the Crystal Palace" (Morse 1990:218). Similar refractions are evident when we turn to local, South African contexts. Although my purpose here is not primarily historical, protagonists in a South

African mall story cannot be said to be merely American mall forms of the 1970s, the decade in which South African shopping mall development was undertaken in earnest. We also need to understand the longer, less visible view: that arcades such as the steel- and glass-roofed shopping areas of late-nineteenth-century Johannesburg, for instance, features through which this colonial city proclaimed its modernity and metropolitan advancement, were made possible by the technological advances of an 'Age of Iron'. In other words, these light, spacious yet covered shopping promenades were "ingenious adaptations made for the colonial markets of the great nineteenth-century merchandising galleries, from the Crystal Palace of 1851...to the spectacular Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II in Milan (1865-7)" (Chipkin 1993:21). I return to the matters of mall and history later in the Chapter when I explicitly stage several variants of 'history' in relation to some KwaZulu-Natal shopping centres. Clearly, despite the prestige attached in development-speak to primacy and scale, which structure we designate 'the first' mall depends on the degree to which we recognise a prototypically modern mall type in early forms of shopping space. The institution that we know as the contemporary shopping mall derives from the management of space along axes of continuity and innovation, metropolitan norm and local adaptation. If the mall's most ancient and unruly provenance is the Greek agora, its history is also "replete with experimentation and a host of small inventions" which facilitated arrangements of space that were perceived to be both more efficient, and more human. "The shopping cart, for instance, introduced in the 1930s, greatly facilitated the operation of supermarkets, which were a prominent feature of early shopping centres" (Gumpert and Drucker 1992:186), while the successful introduction of the convivial eating area as focus of many contemporary malls "was a mile-stone of shopping centre design" in the 1970s (Rybczynski 1994:52) which, paradoxically, brought them closer in form to their ancient precursors. Electronic shopping malls are also set greatly to alter the forms of human and commercial transaction long-associated with the mall as cultural marketplace (Gumpert and Drucker 1992).

'Milling': Neither Dismissal nor Celebration

Having read thus far in the Thesis, the reader will not anticipate an argument which maintains that the pervasive presence of the shopping mall in many countries around the world attests to the unilateral success of a cultural imperialism in which North America is the authoritarian senior partner, or to the perfidious infiltrations of capitalist (post)modernity into all corners of the globe. Instead, s/he should by now expect an analysis in which malls are more sympathetically constructed, perhaps along the lines of De Certeau's work which, as I have already indicated, articulates the productive meanings of forms of everyday life including architecture, transportation and food (1984). His vision of an enabling, liberating praxis via enunciation (whether linguistic, pedestrian, or of another kind) that allows individuals to evade predetermined paths (whether literal and/or figurative), prompts me to consider how structurally fixed *places* such as malls are reinvented by users as practiced, habitable *spaces* or as spatially displaced nonplaces that include potentially liberating elsewhere and elsewhens. As Fiske avers of consumer culture more broadly, it may be the case that "our experiences are produced and bounded by the social order" – whether this is thought to be capitalism, American cultural imperialism, and/or 'the mall', but the sense we make of these experiences

and of ourselves within them, is not necessarily the one the dominant forces in that order would wish...[O]ur society has not been produced by an uncomplicated triumphal march of capitalism, or patriarchy, or any other social force: its history is one of constant conflicts in which all victories are partial, all defeats less than total. (1989:180)

The Chapter should make clear that such polemological metaphors usefully construct the shopping mall as a cultural site whose meanings are subject to contestation rather than easy condemnation. But I also deliberately shift Fiske's antagonistic rhetoric so as to accommodate the tropes of exhibition and performance through which Kowinski (1992), for instance, animates the ostensible monolith of the 'hard' city as simultaneously the locus of pleasurable human agency. As in the case of each section of my Thesis, the big issue informing the Chapter on malls may be simply expressed: how viable is it to insist on consumers as passive victims who are disabled by the sites in which they experience Capital's commodified relations? And, paradoxically, to what extent do the forms of cultural engagement and conceptualisation made available by Capital also enable people to retain and exercise surprisingly complex forms of agency? Working with this range of questions in relation to 'the mall' allows the researcher to understand mall space and its meanings as at once evident and hidden; fixed and yet flexible. It becomes possible to analyse 'the mall' as an institution erected to the egotistical good of Capital yet nevertheless fashioned by human beings into a space where diverse meanings jostle, hurry, and stroll onto and off the stage of what those in the mall industries call 'the retail drama' (Kowinski 1992:204).

For many ordinary users, indeed, 'the mall', seems to have become an ambiguous emblem of the beliefs and practices of consumer culture: sometimes superficial, monotonous, banal, alienating, and yet sometimes plentiful, heterogeneous, and diverse. Something referred to in a form of conceptual shorthand as 'the mall' may be associated with a range of pleasures and labours which renders extremely problematic any reading of formal shopping locations that privileges *either* generalised dismissal or celebration. Thus the Chapter takes up paradoxical claims. It considers the mall as a popular (well-liked; used by many people) form which is on occasions made more popular (democratic; egalitarian) through public function, or through the appeal of theme. It also looks towards counter arguments of (themed) mall space as an extension of a repressive, neo-military architectural syntax, in which human experience is standardised and regimented. When it comes to responding to malls, I argue, we may legitimately situate ourselves between the affirmative and the negative camps, being neither wholly convinced nor unrelentingly sceptical....and it becomes crucial for the cultural critic to grant the validity of this ambivalence.

While I refer to a number of local and international malls, my main referents are the uncompleted histories of The Wheel, The Workshop, and The Pavilion, and the Chapter also involves a good deal of strategic 'wandering' around ways in which to theorise the quirks, pleasures, irritations and kinds of consciousnesses that are associated with mall space. Working with eclectic material, part of my purpose is both to correlate and differentiate shopping spaces in order to consider how mall design evokes a *typical* notion of genre, even while it produces and maintains a *particular* sense of place. As in the Chapter on South African women's magazines, my analysis of malls works with both generic sameness ('the mall' as a type marked by recurrent spatial configurations and expectations,) and with particularity and difference (The Pavilion, The Workshop, The Queensmead Mall...). I also allow that malls may be variously sites of regular use, and of occasional, tourist-like sight-seeing. (Even the mall which is frequented by a shopper on an habitual basis, in fact, may be rendered meaningful through the types of pleasure taken by tourists in spectacular, exotic locations. And nor need such overtly specular relations attest to the distanciation of self and object, to the objectification supposedly typical of displaced modern sensibilities.)

My decision to refer especially to the examples of The Wheel, The Pavilion and The Workshop, shopping locations in the Durban metropolitan area, initially had only a personal impetus: these centres have, over time, caught my attention through their initial launches in the

media, and have become part of my own shopping repertoire. Yet even this idiosyncratic logic is informed by the theoretical, since I emulate the example of Morris in her essay "Things to Do With Shopping Centres" (1993b), where she purposely offers critical commentary on a *localised* shopping area *familiar* to her through patterns of repeated, even habitual use, so as to begin 'mapping' the co-ordinates of mall use in her daily life. My selection of malls also acquired a subsequent, more conventional rationale: two of the centres have 'pioneering' status. The Workshop is South Africa's first theme shopping complex, and The Pavilion, also a themed mall, is KwaZulu-Natal's first properly regional shopping centre. As Morris's study illustrates, an analysis of shopping malls may usefully be predicated upon both the general and the particular, 'the mall' and 'a specific mall'. Research into the shopping mall as structure and practice may (for Morris, *should*) emphasise a "localized affective relation to shopping spaces (and to the links between those spaces and other sites of domestic and familial labour)", even while allowing (for Morris, *cursorily*) that "all shoppers may be cruising grammarians" who read "similarity from place to place" in decoding the differences, contiguities and coherences between malls, their components, and related cultural practices (1993b:297-8).

The recognition that malls are part of what Morris calls an extensive network of "related cultural practices" is also central to the way in which I represent mall space in this study. I maintain that the meanings of shopping malls derive from a complex circulation of practices and texts: in other words, 'the mall' is both built form and multiple-mediation. The meanings which 'the mall' may be granted are vectored into representations of mall space and consumer-relations in the media, for instance; they also intersect with those practices which most visibly occur within the mall location: shopping, obviously, but also 'looking' and 'walking'. (Much later in this Chapter, once I have discussed 'the mall' as concrete structure and as signifier, I return to looking and walking as the bodily modes of behaviour through which most of us experience mall space.)

'The mall' has entered a wide cultural imaginary not only as architectural structure, but as the subject of movies, cartoons, jokes, stickers, labels, pop-philosophy and toys. Examples abound.

1. Developer: and over here, I'm going to build a mall.
Interviewer: What about environmental impact?
Developer: Oh, no problem. It's going to be a mega-mall, plenty big enough to make a lasting impression.
2. "I have to keep shopping. I know my life will work if I can just find the perfect outfit" (Women's Press calendar, 1992).
3. "Shop till you drop"; "Born to shop"; "A woman's place is in the mall"; "When the going gets tough, the tough go shopping" (Bumper sticker and T-shirt slogans).
4. "Melanie's Mall: The Main Mall has it all. Working fountain, beauty shop,...motorised escalator down to the food court. Ages 4 & up." (Toy supplement to the *Highway Mail* 5 December 1997). 'Melanie's Mall' is available either as complete 'shopping centre' (R499.99) or as individual, single-storey shop fronts (R49.99) able to be stacked together into a mall structure. Glamour Gowns Shop, Star Gymnastics Shop, Marry Me Bridal Shop...the units reproduce in miniaturised and stylised form many of the architectural and lifestyle features of contemporary mall space – centre courts, piazzas, escalators, speciality shops, entertainment and leisure facilities. "The complete magical mall for Melanie and all of her friends" (packaging). The human element of the mall is emphatically female, and the packaging personalises 'Melanie' through a brief cv in which appear the following details: "Hobbies – sewing, stamp-collecting, gardening and shopping; Career goal: fashion designer; Favourite saying: 'It's cool at the mall'."

What are we to make of cultural representations such as these? My response to 'Melanie's Mall', for instance, is uncertain: is the toy coercive, conning little girls into a culture of femaleness, or is it at least more conducive to childish fun than the stock of weaponry, overtly designated 'boys toys', on the adjacent stand? Is this binaristic impulse false? And how do the anxieties and hopes

thinly concealed by my silent meta-commentary sit with my conviction that consumers are not dupes, the unquestioning recipients of cultural meanings? For if the toy reproduces 'the mall', persuasively inviting the child to participate in a received set of cultural practices, it also reduces the conventional gigantism of mall scale, subjecting it to the interventions of the consumer, and thus rendering more clearly a scope for individual, even personalised agency in piecing the mall into meaningful, imaginative arrangements. The meanings attached to 'the mall', perhaps, are not merely reproduced in consumption, but are actively produced, in ways that unevenly intersect with whatever we might imagine to have been the 'intentions' of the most visible forms of economic production characteristic under capitalism.

My ambivalence to 'Melanie's mall' as place of forceful fantasy is not unusual. As several of the colloquial representations of mall space and affiliated practices quoted above should suggest, malls are the kind of shopping locations to which cynical urban sophisticates seem unable to refer without "a smirk or a sigh" (Rybczynski 1994:51), a response at least reasonably honest in that it acknowledges a complicity, at once selfconsciously performative and more unselfconsciously utilitarian, with the pervasive commodity culture of late-twentieth-century capitalism. Morse (1990), for instance, produces unusual intersections amongst several cultural forms that are central to modern life – the mall, the freeway and television. She argues that the habitual matrix of contemporaneity is

made of mundane opportunities and choices and composed of practices conducted half-aware, which assemble one's very personhood. What is new in contemporary life...[is] the interpenetration of layer upon layer of built environment and representation, the formative and derivative, the imaginary and the mundane. (1990:21)

Thus all people exist within the far-reaching ambit of landscapes of consumption and leisure; we are influenced by their mass-mediations even if we avoid the actual locations. Equally important is the recognition that if 'the mall' is materialised through "bumper stickers announcing, 'A woman's place is in the mall,' coffee mugs decorated with the words 'mall rats,' or T-shirts that proclaim the pathology of the 'shopaholic'" (Fiske 1989:3), these texts "can be used defiantly, sceptically, critically, variously". The meanings

of shopping malls...cannot be read off the primary texts themselves, but only in their social uses and relationships with other texts....The meanings of popular culture exist only in their circulation, not in their texts; the texts, which are crucial in this process, need to be understood not for and by themselves but in their interrelationships with other texts and with social life. (Fiske 1989:3-4)

My own view is that academic writing about malls needs to bring together diverse discourses like scholarly research, commercial release, popular reviews, informal comment, autobiography, and advertising in order to materialise 'the mall'. This may seem a banal point: so 'the mall' is implicated in diffuse cultural repertoires and generic knowledges, familiar to consumers not solely as fixed architectural structure but as prolific yet conceptually interanimated mass-mediated representations and even patterns of thought and behaviour. Yes, and...? What we need to see, though, is that the claim can be taken up in nuanced ways. Morse (1990), as I have said, provocatively conceives of the mall, television and the freeway as constituting a contemporary ontology of habituated, everyday distraction and displacement. In an argument premised on the interchangeability of signs and objects, she considers these contemporary cultural forms and associated practices to be analogues (even archetypal chronotypes) which share a parallel iconicity based on common preconditions and principles of articulation. Structurally, such forms as television, freeway and mall may not share physical resemblances or the boundedness of contiguity. But they allow for "the exchange of values between different ontological levels and otherwise incommensurable facets of life, for example, between two and three dimensions, between language, images and the built environment, and between the economic, societal, and

symbolic realms of our culture” (1990:194). Freeways, malls and television are systems of communication and exchange that are not merely similar in form

they are systems constructed to interact in mutually-reinforcing ways. Each institution is a kind of socio-cultural distribution and feedback system for the others. Television (most obviously as mass-audience network broadcasts) serves as the nationwide distribution system for symbols in anticipation and reinforcement of a national culture presented not only as desirable but as already realized somewhere else. The mall is a displacement and the enclosure of the walkable street and a collective site in which to cash in the promises of the commodities seen on television. The freeway is the manifestation of personal mobility at its most literal, its radius a lifeline that makes the consumption style of suburban living and shopping economically feasible as well as logistically possible....Convertibility between systems means that values can be exchanged whether they are expressed as commodity objects or images, in two or three dimensions, or in gigantic or miniature scale. (Morse 1990:210)

Given such elusive intersections, what Morse calls “the discursive plane” of a cultural form will inevitably include “all sorts of unrelated...material, from ads, logos, and... public-service announcements, to promotions and lead-ins, as well as the discursive segments within...[television] programs..., from openers and titles to presentational segments” (1990:201). At least to some extent, this represents a de-realisation of generically-conceived cultural structure and communication, since utterance, concrete form, experience and image “waver uncertainly in reality status” (Morse 1990:201): what we see/have seen/will see in the mall and/or on the freeway we see/have seen/will see on television we see/have seen/will see people using in the mall and on television....The permutations are themselves the subject of a postmodern manifesto, for this is how we see, how we perceive the worlds of contemporary culture. As you see, the recognition of such volatility makes possible new apprehensions of reality, allowing the researcher an intellectual freedom unprecedented within discipline- and genre-specific boundaries. Morse herself seems unsure about how to evaluate the complex cultural-technological-perceptual intersections that she is theorising: sometimes she hints at an underlying ideological and experiential constriction; sometimes she implies that it is precisely these new, previously unimaginable interrelations which represent a subtle capacity for social and psychological change.

In shaping a critical understanding of the mall, I believe the academic researcher is best served by a purview deliberately loose and premised on no single critical-theoretical authority despite drawing on the strengths of English Studies. The method is interdisciplinary, and even sometimes undisciplined. In this Chapter on the mall, for example, I illustrate something of the often divergent views that malls have provoked, and have found myself obliged to extract comments from a range of critics. I do, however, provide a framework for this eclecticism. Firstly, I often use dramatically divergent views in order to stage a debate about malls as ambiguous cultural sites. Necessarily reducing, somewhat, the theoretical sophistication that might be evident when responding in detail to a comment placed in its intellectual context, I tend to highlight the fundamental emphasis of a critic. Does s/he represent ‘the mall’ as either a site of capitalist co-optation or as potential site of productive consumer agency? Secondly, and paradoxically, another form of my own agency in this debate is to search out productive intersections between ostensibly polarised views. Thus there are particular theorists to whom I turn and return in the course of the Chapter as a way of showing the inadequacies of responses premised on either celebration or critique.

While my own reading of malls is mediated through theory as a professional signifier of intellectual life, my register is also at moments deliberately informal. Indeed, it is often touched by what a referee of a version of this Chapter submitted for publication in a cultural studies journal spurned as “inference and analogy instead of cold analysis and reasoning”. Yes, I *do* sometimes respond to malls with calculated precision, rushing in to a particular location with a

precise purpose and limited time in hand. I *am* sometimes analytical about malls: when having to negotiate a labyrinthine structure, or when viewing what at that point strikes me as an egotistical built form hemmed in by highways. But I also respond to malls with enjoyment: taking pleasure in the spectacle and the paradoxical promise of possession and abandonment signified by the commodities on display and by the familiar yet momentarily new spaces of the mall itself. And the sensations of both pleasure and distance are informed by feeling inflected with reason. The selective experiential memory bank through which 'the mall' as generic form is made real to individuals is always a product of the emotional and the rational. Thus my reading of mall spaces is more thoroughly bodily than the cerebral connotations of 'reason' imply.

One of the primary difficulties in writing on the reading of the South African shopping mall has been the lack of an extensive body of criticism. As my remarks in the Introduction concerning the loose formation of 'cultural studies' work in South Africa illustrate, there *do* exist stimulating disciplinary convergences in the broadly cultural research being produced in South Africa, yet this syncretic methodology has not been applied to the subject of malls. Interdisciplinarity aside, there is anyway a dearth in South Africa of research into the shopping mall and related activities as cultural-symbolic discourse.

I have made use of locally-available international material which deals expressly with contemporary shopping centres, while useful historical-analogical functions have been served by the speculative reveries concerning arcades and department stores of early writers on commodity culture such as Walter Benjamin. (I am thinking here of his influential yet unfinished 'arcades project', in which he explores the genealogy of commodity fetishism in the environment of nineteenth-century Paris, in quirky responses to spectacular forms such as glass-and-ironwork-enclosed shopping arcades, dioramas and exhibition halls [1978a and 1989].) But extended commentary on the subject of shopping malls by South African literary-cultural academics seems not to exist. Consequently, I have been driven to search more widely than the subject of 'shopping centres', and in sources beyond the pages of the recognised academic volume: to extrapolate from sporadic references to built form and commodity culture in advertisements; to scan the ephemeral forms of newspaper and magazine journalism; and to make creative use of the often rather unselfconscious, theoretically-deficient project reviews and descriptions which appear in South African architectural and planning journals. My own copies of the mall-related professional magazine *Shopping Centre Profile*, interestingly enough, were found not in a library, but in a 'Goodwill Shop' run by TAFTA (The Association For The Aged).

The South African researcher searching out academic commentary explicitly on malls will of course find any number of expressly architectural volumes on the subject. (The seminal studies are those of Victor Gruen and Larry Smith [1960] and Johann Geist [1983].) A subject search via *SABINET* into South African journal holdings gives access to roughly 550 items, a mix of commercial, professional and academic commentary. But it remains comparatively difficult to find examples of either local or foreign written intellectual engagement with shopping malls that venture beyond discussions of architectural description, planning, and factual site history; retailing; and the geographic specialisations of central place theory. Morris (1993b) attests to having faced similar difficulties when researching shopping centre design and patronage in Australia, and she struggled to find her way amongst obsessive reveries, full-blown project descriptions, consumer data, and anecdotal recollection. For my part, I was wanting a response which did not dismiss specialist, disciplinary-specific investigations into shopping malls, but which also went further in either implying or exploring the elusive symbolic resonances of 'the mall' as a network of cultural beliefs, practices and technologies.

It came as something of a surprise, then, to discover Morris, and to see that my preferred, 'idiosyncratic' critical tactics had intellectual precedent. In her article "Things to Do with Shopping Centres" (1993b), this Australian journalist and 'freelance intellectual' deliberately eschews critical rationality in the forms of omniscient authorial and disciplinary control, in favour of a critical inquiry which begins, meanders, recapitulates, and reimagines. She struggles to develop a reading of particular malls which is not limited to either starry-eyed wonder or to the pseudo-objectified positivism of market research. In many respects her work is exemplary. She is honest and vigilant, critical and caressing, in her attempt to construct the forms and practices of malls and malling as instances of contemporary leisure and labour which have differential histories and appeals. Her method is not precisely mine, but it also *essays*, trying out a variety of critical responses to the shopping mall and shopping as an ambiguous experiential and conceptual collocation. She implies that it is this kind of approach which best facilitates an intellectual mapping of the uncertain, love/hate aura which shopping malls have for many people. Kowinski, too, in *The Mall of America* (1986) and in an article derived from the book (1992), proceeds by crossing disciplinary boundaries. While his volume does become tiresome in its multifold mappings of manifold malls, his method remains valuable in figuring the shopping mall by drawing on architectural analysis, retail journalism, advertisement, anecdote and autobiography. He regards both formal and informal knowledges as necessary to a critical-intellectual sense of the spaces and activities that make malls simultaneously popular yet highly managed forms of consumer culture. Similar, although more brief, is Joan Didion's response to shopping complexes. In "On the Mall" (1979) Didion's authority is consciously vested in an imagining of herself as a critical essayist of North American commodity culture, and as a personal 'someone' who has a subjective 'mall history'. Not only has she throughout her life frequented malls, she wryly recollects having had youthful ambitions in the field of mall design. It is not that she actually intended to plan and build malls, she explains, although this structural egotism once had an attraction for her. Rather, she understands that 'the mall' is a form which validated what were then her own dreams, gripped her imagination and fostered in her the grandiose, expansionist dreams of consumerism through which she might invent herself. Despite herself – despite her capacity for diagnostic assessment of consumer culture – she admits, a woman well-into adulthood, to still remembering chunks of a correspondence course in shopping-centre theory which she studied as a 24-year old working for *Vogue*. Managing 'customer resistance', 'tenant mix', 'anchor tenants'....The Didion billed on the dust jacket as "the quintessential essayist of America" turns the professional terminology and jargon of shopping malls as a discipline into fond irreverence, yet she treats these not dismissively, but as a form of critical confession that does not seek to obliterate her own ambivalent histories of malling. Her criticism carries the fictionalising fascination of the novelist, the personal quality of remembered experience. Her commentary is humane, rather than detached and authoritarian: she situates herself within – rather than above – the very culture about which she writes. This positionality appeals to me in my own attempt to devise a response to malls that is not monotheistic or magisterial, that is autobiographical without being excessively anecdotal.

Given my institutional positioning within (or at the margins of) English Studies, it is perhaps not unexpected that I favour analyses like these, all of which attribute 'authorship' of the shopping mall not solely to agents of the marketplace – architects, planners, promotions people... – but also to individuals in their capacities as consumers and producers of meaning. Of course facts, figures and data *do* imply something about the scale of shopping malls as a cultural phenomenon, and about the consolidated powers through which malls are developed: it can hardly be inconsequential that more than thirty new malls have been built in South Africa over the last

four years. Yet such information only partially conveys the diffuse kinds of formal and informal knowledge in terms of which malls are located in the imaginations of various publics. To put this another way: such information exceeds its ostensible facticity, pointing to shopping malls as symbolically-invested modes of cultural understanding. Within English Studies in particular, the time seems appropriate for an analysis of shopping mall culture that draws on a number of theoretical ideas which have been in *literary* circulation since at least the late 1980s. Since I cannot go into this with anything resembling thoroughness, here are a few suggestions of theorists whose work could prompt the intellectual conceptualisation of malls as more than mere structural or ideological monoliths. De Certeau, for instance (*The Practice of Everyday Life* [1984]), and the by now institutionalised Mikhail Bakhtin (*The Dialogic Imagination* [1981]) both attempt the discursive reconceptualisation of dominant and predetermined conceptions of everydayness, seeking methods for circumventing a closed intellectual discourse in which Meaning is always and fully 'ideological'. Whatever the difficulties that face 'the new South Africa', it cannot be denied that the shift from apartheid to a democratic constitution that is widely upheld as being, on paper, a superlative global model, has seen many South Africans become more conscious of themselves as people entitled to struggle out from beneath The Struggle, to liberate themselves from the actual and rhetorical strictures of lives lived under the rine of terror. This is where De Certeau and Bakhtin (among others), since they conceive of the liberations of the everyday as more nuanced and varied than the demonstrably political, could help us to theorise the repetitions and the spectacles of a late-1990s South Africa.

The phenomenon of 'the mall' is perhaps still too recent to have attracted much intellectual attention. Or, less generously, let me suggest that 'the mall' has been ignored by intellectual commentators precisely because shopping malls are many, and are frequented by what is assumed to be a critically undistinguished mass. I am reluctant to formulate conspiracy theories here, but embedded in the dearth of cultural commentary on the mall – embedded, indeed, in English Studies' unwillingness to develop the ideas of theorists such as Bakhtin beyond the parameters of the pre-eminent *literary* genres of the novel, the play and the poem – is perhaps an implicit pejorative. Among at least some academics in the Humanities with whom I have discussed my research, there appears to be the conviction that malls are always to be understood as examples of speculative architecture cathected into cupidity with a Capital C; that malls are inevitably places – even 'palaces' – of conspicuous consumption; and that if malls are out of necessity used by even the person of superior intellect, they are for the most part frequented and enjoyed only by various kinds of vacuous morons. High on the list are 'airhead' youngsters, and parasitic (house)wives of leisure who have nothing better to do. None of this says much, of course, for the academic researcher who is interested in devising a sympathetic critical framework for the understanding of the shopping mall as popular cultural form.

Instead of being drawn into a polemical quagmire, though, I ought to do more at this point to contextualise the stigmatisation of the shopping mall by South African cultural commentators. Perhaps it is the case that even in a nominally democratic country, matters such as leisure and the spaces in which these activities occur must be relegated to second-class status against more urgent agendas. It would be foolish, for example, to deny the claims upon the critical intellectual of matters such as the following: the difficulties faced by the ANC in the first three-and-a-half years of power in implementing a reconstruction and development program; the daily revelations in hearings held by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission; the failure to curtail a spiralling crime rate; the increase in white-collar crime and public-service related graft; widespread chaos within national educational structures.... I could continue. It is matters such as these, more closely implicated in the social base than in the cultural superstructure, that understandably have the

actual and televisual capacity to push 'the mall' onto the periphery. Yet as I argue throughout the Thesis, for the intellectual repeatedly to foreground the spectacularly, politically consequential is also unjustly to deflect attention from the more banal cultural forms and practices through which human identity is experienced and made meaningful. Without taking seriously those forms of habituated, and sometimes ephemeral culture that comprise many people's daily dullness and daily desire, the cultural critic *misrepresents* the odd, even ironic conjunctions of realities that make up the South African contemporary.

In order not to do a disservice to South African intellectual life, I must refer also to the unwillingness of even North American intellectuals to admit the pertinence of research on the mall. Here, I am drawing on an account of the experience of Richard Francaviglia, which he related to Kowinski, author of "The Mall of America" (1992). As a professor of geography (rather than English- or even cultural studies) at the University of Texas, Francaviglia might legitimately be expected to study new cultural forms like "the organization of cities and the nature of theme parks, phenomena that have escaped or transcended traditional academic categories" (Kowinski 1992:201). But even so, Francaviglia "had a tough time getting his academic colleagues to take malls seriously. When he read one of his papers on malls at a Popular Culture Association convention in Chicago", he "'nearly started a riot.... Quite literally, scholars were yelling back and forth at each other – and at me. It was all very stimulating, but while we were arguing, 20 million people were shopping in malls and generally enjoying themselves'" (Kowinski 1992:201). As Warren emphasises, although cultural commentators have been loathe to theorise 'the popular' as it relates to numerical popularity, annual visitors to destinations like the West Edmonton Mall in Alberta "number in the millions, figures that no doubt only begin to approximate the total picture when we include every visit to the local amusement area, shopping mall or fastfood restaurant" (1993:174). Malls increasingly blur leisure, entertainment and commodity as forms of self and social knowledge, and they might consequently be considered important in the production of contemporary human relations.

As I have said, critical commentary on South African malls from Humanities-Social Science perspectives is scarce. Within the pages of volumes related specifically to English Studies and cultural criticism, the mall is more of an absence than a presence, passed over as undeserving of serious cultural comment, and/or gestured towards as cultural banality-cum-insidiousness. A few dismissals of malls by South Africans do exist in formal publications, but the form's low cultural status amongst 'the intelligentsia' is more often implied in off-the-cuff, passing derogations of malls as part of mass, consumer culture. The topic has been pushed beyond the margins of serious academic respectability. Admittedly I am caricaturing this kind of intellectual conviction; but not much.

Making the most of the mall-related material I have been able to find, however, let me extrapolate from the misgivings of a creative and critical writer like Stephen Watson expressed in the somewhat hubristically entitled *Selected Essays* (1990). Were I to take my cue from Watson, I would find myself coaxed to theorise shopping malls as yet another instance of an impoverished national culture. For Watson, the South African built environment is so lacking in the patina and grace of age, so enamoured of a crass Americanised fast food architecture, that banality of life experience can be the only result (1990). I cannot really do justice to Watson's poignant-portentous version of cultural melancholy so characteristic of the intellectual white South African, but it seems fair to say that on his cultural map, the shopping mall deserves to be bypassed as yet another instance of the cultural imperialism which destroys and supplants a more authentically 'real' South African culture. (Watson's romanticised premise, we understand, is that

South African 'Europeans' cannot be anything but pale imitations of really real Europeans, such that a truly South African culture must derive from indigenous energies.)

While he finally reaches a similar conclusion, Tony Karon is more 'knowing' in his piece of newspaper journalism on The Waterfront Mall in Cape Town's Victoria and Alfred Waterfront, a venue which attracted seven million visitors in 1990, the first year of its operation. Karon well-understands the forms of urban marketing represented by mega-mall developments, cross-referencing to a global trend evident in such geographically dispersed locations as San Francisco, Baltimore, Boston, Sydney, Vancouver and Paris. And he grudgingly grants that The Waterfront has "a pleasant environment – pretty little boats bobbing in the harbour, seals lolling about on platforms, the cry of gulls, sea air and the like" (1992:34). But he cannot rid himself of an overriding scepticism about both the venue and the people who flock there for their pre-packaged experiences of "Cape Town leisure-time" (1992:34). The shoppers are deprecatingly depicted as a misguided collective of youthful trendoids devoid of individuality: "a young shopper in a tangerine polo shirt clutching a CNA packet [who] waxes enthusiastic"; a "young Salt River man in a Raiders cap [who] concurs"; a "Sea Point joller"; a "slightly defensive" waiter "at the Spur" who insists "It's just *different*". For Karon, The Waterfront, "a little like Club Meds", is banal replication. It is no different from any number of analogous sites the first-worldover; it is surreal in erasing cultural distinction and in sanitising the real city. The very existence of The Waterfront suggests

a subconscious laager mentality. Uncertain of itself amid escalating social disintegration and hostility, suburban culture seeks to concentrate its assets within a defensible perimeter. For the tourists, the Waterfront is Cape Town scrubbed, perfumed and packaged. It invites them to discover the city on the same terms as a paint-by-numbers picture postcard. (1992:34)

Karon, though, feels none of the uncertainty which he describes in other consumers, and in comparison with The Waterfront, he offers us with conviction a "distinct experience": Greenmarket Square, situated near the public space of the St George's Street pedestrian mall. No doubt wearing not tangerine, but something equally susceptible to fashion(able) decoding – jeans and T-shirt, say, or handprinted New South African-West African garb, Karon eulogises the Square. It is a carnivalesque sprawl that "overflows in colourful chaos", where "City traders challenge Council traffic regulations amid the cheery cacophony of Cape Town's cultures encountering each other on the street" (1992:34). As I hope to show in this Chapter, if 'the mall' is sometimes susceptible to the reading which Karon prefers, it is also more and less than he insists: more varied, diverse, open; less inherently insidious and trite. If the mall may be analysed through metaphors of challenge alongside accommodation, it also points us to the increasingly complex syncreticisms that structure contemporary consumer culture. Indeed, the mall form often borrows from the very codes of the culturally heterogeneous street which Karon admires; and the street, too, is a space not completely distinct from the consumer place that is the mall.

Perhaps I should point out, here, that responses like Karon's are not unusual, or are not restricted to a cultural criticism that is cynical of the premises of postmodernism. Let me discuss a particularly emphatic case. Richard Guassardo, writing in 1979, characterises mall worlds as "seductively lit, sumptuously decorated...avenues" replete with "innumerable boutiques filled with their saffron, polyester or satin 'creations'". In Guassardo's piece, the *necessary* response to 'the mall' is a hermeneutics of outright suspicion, since the

rise of vast shopping complexes, malls, in the northern and eastern suburbs of Johannesburg is neither fortuitous nor innocent. Developed and constructed by the surplus capital of certain dominant corporations (surplus in the form of pension funds and investment moneys from the likes of BP, Guardian, Liberty Life, Anglo, Shell, etc.), they offer the starry-eyed, financially fluent or jaded consumer – the 'housewife' in particular – the means to satisfy a number of fantasies that were more difficult to stage in the past. (1979:61)

Notice, here, that fantasy is derided as a dubious form of 'new' cultural investment, and that particular scorn is reserved for *female* roles in the processes of consumption. (Later in the Chapter, I take up the idea that the denigration of malling probably has more than a little to do with the activity and the place having been designated a female, and hence trivial form of social knowledge.) It would be historically inaccurate for me to dismiss Guassardo's comments outright, given the late 1970s South African context in which they were made. He is referring to malls such as Eastgate and Rosebank, built in Johannesburg's wealthier suburbs during the height of apartheid capitalism, and marketed at the time as paradise for select, elite (white) consumers. When viewed against dramatic political events such as Soweto 1976, or even against white South Africa's everyday normalisation of the apartheid inequalities written into statute books, it seems understandable that those white South African intellectuals who opposed the status quo would feel compelled to offer a sceptical response to such 'mall worlds'. Malls were to be damned as escapist, commodified excesses. There was little or no space, at the time, for Guassardo to read 'the shopping mall' with an eye for complex imaginative investments.

Drawing on the cultural melancholy-cum-pessimism which characterises each of the three responses outlined above, let me proceed rather audaciously by compiling a hypothetical composite of the dystopian critique to which the shopping mall is likely to be subjected by intellectuals in the South African literary-cultural disciplines. I use as my example The Pavilion, KwaZulu-Natal's largest, first regional shopping centre. (See Figure 4.i.) Its 180 shops and 4300 parking bays, staged in terms of a simulated, eclectically Victorian imperial theming, have made it the most successful mall in Africa since its opening after a massive fanfare of publicity in October 1993.

Although later in this Chapter I explore the implications of what is often taken to be The Pavilion's inappropriately 'Victorian' design, it is not merely on the grounds of theme that detractors have made a case against this mall. Indeed, opponents of the development tend to argue that *despite* the playful guise of theme, The Pavilion is a "retail behemoth" and thus "a blot on the landscape" (Slessor 1995:21). Like so many malls, it is "an architectural crudity" (Slessor 1995:21), with a massive bulk that cannot but effect mastery over both location and leisure. A number of features might be pointed to: the mall's undeniably fortress-like facade, when viewed from certain positions, and its physical dominance of the adjacent township cum squatter-camp of Chesterville. Such negative readings would be reinforced with reference to features that recur in the management of external mall environments: The Pavilion is surrounded by perimeter lights and security fencing, and presents what amounts to well-nigh impossible access for shoppers who are obliged to approach on foot. (Many of The Pavilion's tenants, indeed, employ people from Chesterville, and although the mall and the township are immediate neighbours, access for these workers is difficult and dangerous: the steep, informal track shielded by thick vegetation works to encourage rape and robbery.) The dominating, centralised bulk of The Pavilion, further, might be considered an apt embodiment for several iniquitous forms of centralisation that are associated with 'the mall' form in South Africa. A fundamentally negative critique of The Pavilion would stress that malls have to do with markets and means and, drawing on Margaret Crawford's work, it might remind us that "dense agglomerations of malls...indicate the richest markets, and empty spots the pockets of poverty" (1992:7). In terms of this, The Pavilion's situation in Westville, a relatively wealthy, mainly white-Indian suburb which is also well-situated in relation to several other such suburbs, would probably be read as an expedient function of potential spending power. (As the Durban Retail Library survey of people's use of malls in the greater Durban region indicates, approximately 45% of KwaZulu-Natal's population is not working, although whether this includes retired as well as unemployed people is not clear.) The dystopian critic would also

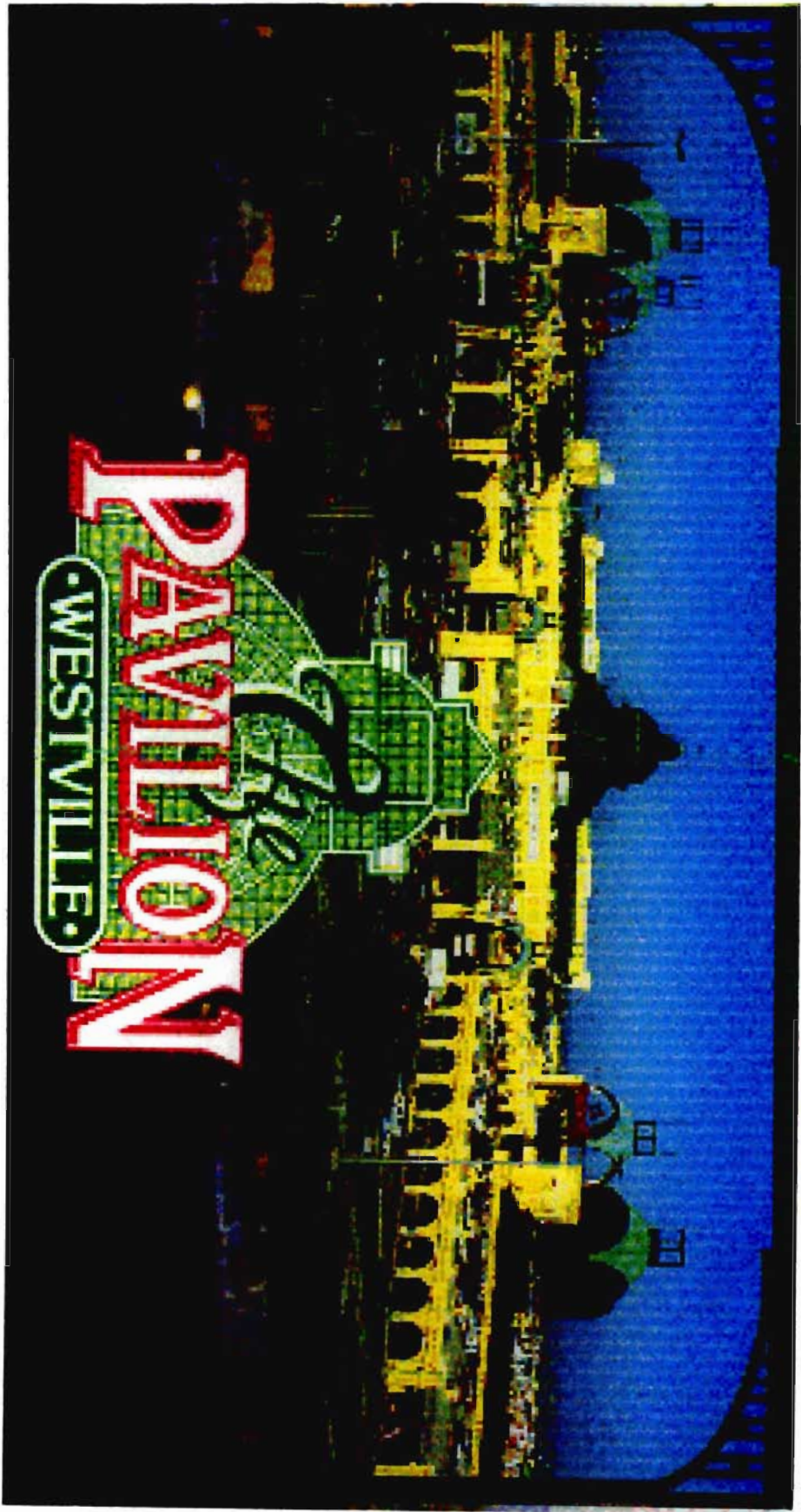


Figure 4.i

be concerned to show that The Pavilion – a joint venture of M&R Properties and Retail International and funded by the Eskom Pension Portfolio “in a R340m agreement, believed to be the biggest contract in South Africa between a developer and a single financial institution” (Lawrence 1992:31) – arose from the investment of apartheid-derived Capital, and should be viewed as an offshoot of a 1990s version of a manipulative Culture Industry. In this light, too, the determinedly critical intelligence could extrapolate from the single instance of The Pavilion, making much of the monopolisation and hence centralisation of the South African mall market by a few big business interests: architects Bentel Abramson and Partners, for instance, are responsible for more than 65 centres nationwide, including The Wheel, The Workshop, The Pavilion, Sandton Square and La Lucia Mall. Sanlam Properties owns at least 17 major ‘regional’ shopping centres, including Musgrave Centre, The Workshop, Sanlam Centre Pinetown, and Westgate Mall. (As Crawford explains in her article, shopping mall development involves such vast financial and technical endeavour that participation is restricted to a small circle of major developers [1992:7]. Thus, as is dramatically the case with the West Edmonton Mall in Alberta, Canada, the super-regional development on which Crawford focusses, the visible giganticism of mega-structure so typical of mall design also testifies to the economies of scale that are ‘built into’ the very project.)

Working from the particular instance of The Pavilion as bulky architectural monolith to ‘the mall’ as generic form, it could be said that The Pavilion exemplifies the conventional South African shopping centre. It has a substantial building mass, internal-facing shopping precincts or malls, and the “massive planar walls necessary on an internal mall scheme” (*Shopping Centre Profile* 1992:25). The mall, here, is subject to ominous semantic displacement, fixed not as site of pleasure, but of social control, for the term ‘precinct’, of course, is familiar to most South Africans from televised American police dramas. It comes as no surprise to discover, then, that the internal malls characteristic of South African mall space allow for controlled flow patterns, and “are easier to police and secure” partly because of monitored vehicular access (*Shopping Centre Profile* 1992:25). Township urban legend has it, in fact, that the flat roofs of many South African malls built during the 1970s and 1980s were disguised helipads, from which agents of the apartheid state could launch a war of total onslaught against black people. Placed in relation to the totalitarian logic of crowd management and mass policing, Johann Geist’s seminal research into arcades can only confirm the dystopian view of ‘the mall’. Geist points out that if the arcade was important to the development of retail space, “the arcade system of access [also] revolutionized the prison building”. In the penitentiary, the domed space “is not, as in churches, the place of the gods; not, as in arcades, the meeting place of urban public life; but the space of total control by a single uniformed guard” (1983:28). Nor is this the only aspect of The Pavilion that is open to critique when it is considered as an exemplar of the South African shopping mall. For The Pavilion’s immediate spatial co-ordinates include not only the township of Chesterville, but the institutional complexes of Westville Prison and Westville Hospital, and the building-in-progress of the vast West Way Office Park. These could be said to comprise a disciplinary-ideological grid which symbolises the paradoxically restrictive governmentality of an expansive (South African) ‘late capitalism’ or ‘modernity’. The conjuncture of mall, township, hospital, prison and ‘office park’ could, with reference to Bentham’s panopticon via Foucault (1975), be made to contribute to an argument for the regulatory, standardising principles and the pervasive discursive regimes characteristic of modernity. Here, reference would be made not only to the capitalist economic mode of production, but to the production of human subject positions which are managed through explicit and rhetorical surveillance. This argument could be extended to cover the fact that malls are private property, hence their managements effect rigorous

gatekeeping over the kinds of people and activities permitted on the premises. Why else (?) would every glass approach door to The Pavilion, ostensibly so inviting of physical and visual access, bear upon it the legend

No dogs
No hawkers
No skateboards
No roller skates
No photographs
Except with permission from the management.

Shopping malls like The Pavilion, then, are ominous models for an 'orderly' society from which the unconventional, the poor, the infirm, and the unemployed without money, are to be excluded (Worpole 1991:141). Here, malls are envisaged as extreme forms of social engineering; a perversion of the Enlightenment's claim for instrumental reason in achieving the projects of 'modernity' and 'civil society'.

Signification: Local and Global; Material and Symbolic

Yet in a South Africa of the late 1990s, when consumption patterns and communities are shifting out of the old (racially-cathected) A/B/C income groupings once the staple of advertising and media specialists, I maintain that different responses to the mall are possible. If these will probably be filtered through some of the fears and criticisms of the 'New South Africa' that I have already referred to, they might also be more sympathetic to readings of consumer culture in which people are intricately implicated, more willingly to make sense of 'the mall' as a location that is experienced not solely as alienating or through fatigue. My own response is one open to the probability that people's use of mall spaces is likely to involve some criticism alongside some positive recuperation; contradiction rather than easy affirmation or dismissal. The Pavilion's bulk, for instance, is both intimidating *and* suggestive of hidden interior worlds; its situation within an institutional grid may be read as convenient proximity, not merely paranoid control.

For if people express dissatisfaction concerning particular experiences in particular malls, 'the mall' is often affirmed as a genre of everyday life. This becomes clearer when we turn from academic engagement to the registers of informal conversation. (In English Studies these are conventionally considered to be less authoritative, and hence less worthy of critical citation, than documented critical claims. They are ephemeral, difficult to trace or to codify, and thus seem easy to dismiss. English Studies' publications which give critical visibility to 'conversation' remain the exception. I have already referred to Daymond and Lenta's 1990 discussion-article in Chapter 2 on women's magazines.)

Within 'ordinary life', the genre of the shopping mall is frequently granted a kind of commonsensical meaning halfway between Gramsci's folklore and philosophy (1971). Considered from this frame of reference, 'the mall' is widely assumed to be an important, valuable cultural form which, alongside improved access to resources such as housing, education, and community health, can "make it happen where you live" (to adapt an ANC slogan for the 1996 regional elections). This is especially true given the deliberate underdevelopment of certain areas which was integral to apartheid: the Dobsonville Mall, the first major retailing facility to be built in Soweto, has met with much enthusiastic approval, and according to shoppers canvassed by television journalists, the Daveyton Mall, 25 kilometres from Benoni, is popularly welcomed as a "positive mark on the township map". It is praised by locals for "bringing the luxury of town to the township"; for providing jobs, entertainment and retail facilities (large supermarket anchors, Mzantsi's Sports Bar: "The rainbow colour is here"); as well as for affording small business opportunities to the immediate community – Heavens Salon, a garage, the already-

mentioned bar (SABC TV3, 4 April 1995). Even moving beyond the so-called township, it seems at the very least reasonable to suggest that the shopping mall, when compared with retail strip development – retailers located on both sides of a major road – offers the advantages of “one-stop parking, trollies, a mix of tenant types within walking distance and a controlled environment, both climatically and aesthetically” (*Shopping Centre Profile* 1992:25). Whatever the serious ideological critique which academics might be able to generate concerning mall culture and consumption as dominant plotlines in the failed Master Narratives of Modernity (or Postmodernity) and Progress, it is surely difficult to deny that malls are popularly seen to offer a mixture of convenience, leisure, and symbolic aspiration evocative of such values as ‘the modern’ and ‘first world progress’. It is these popular residues – confusedly manifest as ideals, as potentials, as frustrating gaps between the hoped for and the real – which might prompt an academic critic to grant malls, and the meanings which they are given by many people, considered attention rather than dismissal. This becomes even more pertinent once the researcher admits his or her own relation to mall space and ‘everyday’ life, allowing that cultural capital – what counts as worthwhile knowledge – is no longer the preserve of an Academy, but is undergoing substantial revaluation.

Something of the ambiguous nature of the shopping mall is conveyed when we address the ways in which the term has been (re-)articulated in disciplinary and more informal contexts. I know what a shopping mall ‘is’, but in asking questions about a taken-for-granted cultural form, I have found myself fashioning answers that gesture towards both official and more popular kinds of knowledge, and having to admit that ‘the mall’ materialises through both centralising and decentralising impulses. Consider some of the linguistic tautologies implied in the rhetorical constructions of shopping space associated with the terms ‘mall’ and ‘shopping centre’. If a ‘mall’ is simply a sheltered walk or promenade, has the label ‘mall’ come to designate a place of upmarket, Americanised mega consumption, while the expression ‘shopping centre’ resonates with a residual community-derived homeliness? Is the one term generated by a neologistic ‘lifestyle’ speak, while the other grows organically from the language used to describe the collection of stores flanking Everyone’s (false) memory of small-town Main Road?

I cannot cover the ground in much detail, but ‘mall’ and ‘shopping centre’ are sometimes granted contradictory meanings within mall-related professions, and they are sometimes conflated. Within urban geography and the sub-specialisation of central place theory, for instance, a ‘shopping centre’ has conventionally been any of among four shopping locations: convenience, neighbourhood, community and regional. These are defined as geographical areas, rather than built structures, and imply a symbolic hierarchy even though the geography is imaginative rather than purely physical. This becomes evident when we look at expressions such as ‘the CBD’, ‘the outlying business district’, ‘the principle business thoroughfare’, and ‘the isolated store cluster’. While the terms partly describe physical location, they also attribute to it varying significances: central rather than peripheral, principle rather than minor. Further, Harold Carter acknowledges that the designation ‘shopping centre’, taken to mean clustered retail and service area, sits awkwardly in relation to the term ‘shopping centre’ as an architectural agglomeration of shops and facilities. If the term ‘mall’ is applied especially to “the new regional shopping centres” (Carter 1995:71) – in other words, to especially large examples of shopping centre – it is also more widely used to differentiate between geographic and architectural notions of ‘shopping centre’. I take this conceptual uncertainty to be apt illustration of the ideological impossibility of fixing ‘the mall’ as a structure which inherently warrants either vilification or praise.

In the vocabulary of architecture, ‘mall’ denotes *any* form of sheltered pedestrian walkway or lane, which implies that the shopping mall as a contemporary architectural and conceptual type

has a long and varied genealogy. The clearest architectural predecessor of the mall is the covered shopping arcade, as is made clear in Geist's mammoth study *Arcades: The History of a Building Type* (1983), even though he also details applications of the arcade well beyond the specific retail function. (We are probably all familiar, by now, with Benjamin's fascinated study of the arcade form, and he even makes use of popular material in shaping his appreciation of spaces that were at once house and stars. In "Paris: Capital of the Nineteenth Century", for instance, he quotes from the *Illustrated Paris Guide* in order to describe the structure and experience facilitated by arcades: "On both sides of these passages, which obtain their light from above, there are arrayed the most elegant shops, so that such an arcade is a city, indeed a world, in miniature" [1978a:165].) In contemporary retail architecture, the term 'mall' is often used quite specifically to refer to an "internal-facing shopping precinct" (*Shopping Centre Profile* 1992:25) such as characterises many shopping centres. Within colloquial spaces, both 'mall' and 'shopping centre' have come to signify an internal shopping space of some sort, especially a mixture of retail and recreational facilities which are grouped under a single or linked architectural umbrella such that they comprise a 'centre'. They have both come to be associated with the architectural 'enclosing' (or unifying) of amenities and structures which are in traditional 'over-the-counter' strip retail both erected and experienced as more distinct. The official definition of a shopping centre that Kowinski discovered in a publication of the North American Urban Land Institute glosses the form as "a group of architecturally unified commercial establishments built on a site which is planned, developed, owned and managed as an operating unit" (Kowinski 1992:198). The tag 'unit' tends to imply the centralised, anti-democratic forms of control that many cultural commentators despise in consumer culture. Yet the forms of enclosure evident in shopping centres are also very frequently associated with an elaboration of the opportunities available to the shopper. Kowinski refers to shopping centres and malls as being "meticulously planned and brightly enclosed structures...[that] have taken the concept of one-stop shopping, as old as the ancient public market, and turned it into a virtual one-stop culture, providing a cornucopia of products nestled in an ecology of community, entertainment and societal identity" (Kowinski 1986:33). What I'm having to work with when milling around the mall, then, are centrifugal and centripetal impulses. The management of mall space should not be seen to preclude differentiation and diversity, either human or structural. I allow that if there are "plenty of upscale malls that cater to the rich", the classic, so-called 'regional mall', is neither "an effete oasis of luxury" nor "the utilitarian strip of the poor neighbourhood". Instead, it is "the equivalent of a fair-sized downtown shopping area" (Rybczynski 1994:51) and may paradoxically be experienced by those frequenting its spaces as both improving and foreclosing upon the urban variety of the traditional city centre. The shopping mall, I suggest, can best be understood as a site of ambiguity which elicits ambivalent response.

If malls are characterised by those in mall-related professions according to sub-genres such as 'neighbourhood mall', 'community mall', and 'regional mall', descriptions which encode distinctions based on location and magnitude, these labels are unable to manage the meanings through which people authorise their use of shopping centre forms. Increasingly popular in the Durban region, for example, is the 'value centre' which collates under an often utilitarian, shed-like, even industrial shelter a number of fastfood and retail outlets whose perceived connection is their ability to offer 'value-for-money'. The pressure to devise new forms of structure to meet people's felt need suggests that 'the mall' is hardly as monolithic an institution as those in literary-critical studies are inclined to maintain. This protean quality is intensified, I suggest, when we acknowledge that consumers – people who are engaged in shopping and/or leisure – do not give priority to the sorts of professional lexicons and labels that in fact serve primarily to

legitimate disciplinary status by constructing an arcane, mysterious language which 'ordinary people' cannot easily interpret. Instead, depending on where we live and on the routes of our daily and holiday travel, we will be 'bodily' familiar with several mall locations: the 'small mall', an often undistinguished collation of shops and services within a relatively self-effacing architectural umbrella which serves a very specific local community; the self-declamatory mega mall which stands at an economically-viable suburban nexus. In part, the number of malls helps to render the shopping mall more-or-less unremarkable as a feature of late-twentieth-century life. Yet shoppers' experiences of different mall spaces generate a cognitive map premised on generic similarity and the comfortingly familiar, even as it also takes into account the desire for newness, difference and the pleasure of the exceptional. For if 'the mall' as a sociocultural phenomenon is so familiar as to be taken-for-granted, it is also the case that ordinariness is often materialised in an architecture which people recognise as monumental, spectacular, innovative, an open field for shopping as a form of leisure-entertainment, rather than just the tedious trundling of supermarket trolleys.

Viewed against North American history and numbers, South Africa remains a comparatively small retail arena. But there is nevertheless a growing interest in shopping mall development and in malls as significant contemporary social spaces. The headline of an article in the commercial property section of the *Daily News* even exaggerates this into a "Mall Mania", while valuably pointing out that the flurry of mall projects is being fuelled by a post-apartheid release into the market of new consumers (both aspirational and actual), and a trend towards suburbanisation (*Daily News* Journalist 1995:20). Therefore despite a late-twentieth-century interest in the preservation and redeployment of old *city* buildings as places of consumption and entertainment (see my discussion of The Workshop later in this Chapter), it is possible to regard the mall in several of its earlier manifestations this century as not an *urban* but a *suburban* form. Of course there are architectural and retail similarities between suburban shopping malls and the traditional downtown department store. But the department store, originally on a main or major urban thoroughfare, has been characterised primarily as a feature of the big city, while the rise of the shopping centre is linked to a shift in commercial activity from city centres proper and related inner ring submarkets to the suburbs (Chaney 1983 and 1990). This is partly attributable to the fact that suburbs were locations of a growing population with comparatively high disposable income, people to whom the local mall appealed in that it allowed shoppers, many with families, to shop in an environment that offered not only diversity but comparative convenience, safety, and privacy. Suburban behaviour, Tallack argues, especially values privacy, and seeks to escape conventional public spaces which "are either bisected by freeways or are simply dangerous" (1991:137).

Internationally, suburbia has tended to accrue associations of paranoid 'middle class' stability, and Deborah Chambers wastes no time in emphasising that

the obsessive concern with suburbs of houses on separate blocks arose from the early twentieth-century Western abhorrence of crowded city slums and the associated fear of disease and moral degeneracy....The physical shaping of the suburbs has inscribed the ideology of a stable and hierarchical social order. (1997:87)

Even more overtly, South African suburbanisation was mapped according to the racist exclusions of apartheid planning: notions of safety, refuge, and privacy have thus been intensified. In South Africa, for instance, mall development rose in the 1970s as suburbanisation and the explicit politicisation of South African life intensified, which is probably why critics the like of Karon and Guassardo read the South African mall as a middle class laager, a cultural fortress against the potentially invasive Other. From the vantage point of the suburb, the townships and the grey inner city areas have been considered places of threatening socioeconomic and sociopolitical volatility.

With the opening up of urban and suburban areas to black permanent residence through the repealing of the Group Areas Act (1950) in 1991, though, the suburbs have attracted a more broadly 'multiracial', 'multicultural' population whose members are drawn from both blue and white collar groupings.¹ Of course, this has not been an uncontested process, but the present South African suburb in which one might find a shopping mall located is not automatically flagged as a site of privilege against exclusion. As Chapter 1 on *Tribute* magazine has already suggested, contemporary South African suburbanisation is explicable not necessarily as a white flight from the cities, but as a black flight from the townships. This movement embodies a desire on the part of those classes and races of people historically excluded from the South African suburban dream for what is regarded as the relative comfort, status and security of a middle class habitus that is comfortingly connected to, but not absolutely coterminous with, literal space. Even for people who continue to live within those areas designated during apartheid 'townships' or 'locations', the notion of the suburb seems to be an aspirational lifestyle and development model. (The tendency for traditionally white South African suburbs to be both romanticised country havens from the crowded urban centres and sci-fi domestic citadels is the subject for another research paper.) The point is that in popular perception various forms of suburban living continue to represent actual and aspirational markers for many South Africans. As Roger Silverstone muses in somewhat pomo mood about suburbanisation more globally, suburbia

is no longer to be found simply in the landscapes of tract housing or ribbon development, among Victorian villas or in garden cities. It is to be found also, and perhaps increasingly, in the suburban imaginary, a virtual space no longer visible either on the planner's drawing board or on the margins of cities. Suburbia is...constructed in imagination and in desire, in the everyday lives of those who struggle to maintain hearth and family and in the words of those who still are brave (or mad) enough to define and defend bourgeois values. It has a long history. Maybe it still has a future. (1997:13)

Very likely. If the tendency has been to regard suburbanisation in general as a structure of claustrophobic banality (Tupperware Taste and its nationally specific white South African variant: Braaivleis, Rugby, Sunny Skies and Chevrolet), this is a partial rather than an absolute truth. It emphasises the experience of obsessive privatisation, while failing to acknowledge the ways in which suburbanisation helped to make more material the democratisation of space and consumption. Nor can a vestigial rather than euphoric 'egalitarianism' be denied in the case of women's experiences of suburbia, despite suburbanisation in its original forms being a "material and cultural expression of the ideology of feminine domesticity" (Chambers 1997:87). The likelihood of suburbia having a longer-than-anticipated life-expectancy is not disarticulated from the spatial management of actual location and of mindscape that is the shopping mall, whatever the reputed sterility of both forms. Suburbanism, clearly, is a contradictory sociocultural process, at once exclusive and inclusive, hierarchical and transgressive of boundaries. A similar case may be made for the shopping mall, and the susceptibility of the form to ambivalent response should not be taken to signify its inherently suspect nature, but instead its capacity to contain – and to liberate – a variety of meanings. For the researcher of contemporary culture, an open-minded reading of 'the mall' promises access to complex understandings of the everyday culture of late-twentieth-century life. Given that shopping malls were originally conceived to fulfil the purely practical "need of the suburban shopper for a conveniently accessible, amply stocked shopping area with plentiful" parking (Gruen and Smith 1960:23), the development or refurbishment of malls in busy neighbourhood and regional locations is set to continue, with developers searching out connections between economically-efficient building types like massive internal-facing precincts and the more human scale of courtyards, 'town squares', and 'village greens'. And as this Chapter argues, even the concrete monolith (whether spectacularly themed confection or blunt blockhouse) is amenable to reworking through the fluidity of human presence.

Although they vary in form and scale, in degrees of closure or openness to the environment, South Africa now has more than 234 large shopping facilities: between roughly the end of 1993 and 1995, 30 shopping centres were built, and there are further "opportunities [for]...the development of centres in the former black areas" (*Daily News* Journalist 1995:20). If we place The Lost City in the category of leisure-entertainment rather than retail – although this resort has shopping facilities which amount to an upmarket mall, South Africa's most publicised and extensive *retail*-leisure conglomerate is perhaps Cape Town's Victoria & Alfred Waterfront. This venue offers a visitor The Victoria Wharf Shopping Centre and The Waterfront Mall; a vast, said-to-be-state-of-the-art aquarium; proximity to the historic city centre, to regenerated dockyards, to Robben Island, and to other heritage and tourist sites presently under development. On a national scale, the shopping mall continues to be an important form, with large projects achieving particularly visible media coverage in both the general news and lifestyle sections of the popular press, and in the comparatively specialist pages of financial and business supplements. A recent proposal for a large South African mall scheme is Old Mutual's "R3bn supermall plan for Midrand" in Gauteng. The "largest single property development ever seen in South Africa", the complex will "be named Zonk'izizwe (All Nations) Shopping Resort" and is intended to provide residential accommodation (an unusual feature of mall space), as well as "retail facilities from speciality shops to supermarkets and blend the cultural diversity of Africa with state-of-the-art technology in activities including entertainment, the arts and participative education" (*Sunday Independent Business* Journalist 1997:1). The Zonk'izizwe project, billed as a shopping *resort*, expressly capitalises on the desire of previously disadvantaged people for modern, convenient shopping and leisure facilities. In doing so, it makes strategic extensions to the discourses of unified South African nationalism that have emerged in the post-1994 political climate, positing not only an imagined South African consumer community but indeed a network of capitalist relations in which South Africa as a nation takes a pan African lead. There is more than an element of truth in this representation of areas of Gauteng as 'central' African shopping 'complexes', since busloads of shoppers doing large-scale monthly domestic and wholesale purchasing are regularly transported into the greater Johannesburg area from neighbouring countries such as Swaziland, Botswana and Lesotho. Yet with the internal ethnic conflicts and the xenophobia towards 'foreign Africans' that still tend to mark South African urban life, we might be inclined to respond merely with cynicism to the idealistic 'we-are-one' *simunye*-speak of a shopping resort called 'Zonk'izizwe'. Such mall schemes and the media coverage which they are granted are implicated in a discourse of boosterism, a term which is generally given a negative gloss by critics of capitalism. Boosterist projects embody not simply the empirical fact of developers' and financiers' confidence in an economic present, but their projected hopes for a stable economic future. (The 'stability' is premised, somewhat paradoxically, upon temporally unpredictable yet conceptually anticipated patterns of expansion and relative contraction that are integral to the functioning of capitalist discourses of innovation and success.)

But in investigating the symbolic function of shopping complexes such as Zonk'izizwe in the South African social fabric, we ought not to underestimate the rhetorical force of speculative capitalist endeavours in the projecting, if not realising, of both a person's and indeed 'a people's' national desires. For instance, a feature article in *Sawubona*, free in-flight magazine of the South African Airways designed to publicise South African tourist and leisure facilities to foreign visitors, declares that there "is no doubt that South Africa boasts some of the best shopping malls in Africa. As far as mall-crawling is concerned, we definitely leave the rest of the continent standing....In fact, many Europeans and Americans are amazed at the quality of our shopping

centres" (*Sawubona* Journalist 1997:107). (The current editor of *Sawubona*, by the way, is Jon Qwelane, previously of *Tribute* magazine.)

Let me explore such apparently ironic conjunctures of new national narratives and upwardly-mobile personal opportunities through a discussion of Soweto's "biggest majority-black-owned shopping complex" (Leshilo 1997:3), construction of which is currently underway. Biggest majority-black-owned shopping complex: as the unwieldy double hyphenation suggests, the rhetoric of gigantism common to so much capitalist development acquires a particularly complex inflection within the historically exclusionist South African context. The R750-million scheme is publicised as being 'pioneered' by local businessman Richard Maponya. As the legendary history goes, Maponya has been working for 18 years to realise this project on a 24ha plot which he owns in Pimville, and the entrepreneur explains that "It's like a dream come true. I could not develop the land all these years because the banks would not finance me. Now things are beginning to move. Soweto is about to have its first fully-blown regional shopping centre" (Leshilo 1997:3). Maponya makes much of the fact that the new centre "boasts a 'motorworld' to house several car dealers and a 10-theatre cinema facility, the second biggest in South Africa". He "believes the shopping complex has the best location in Soweto", lying along "the busiest road" in the township and linking Soweto with Johannesburg and Potchefstroom (Leshilo 1997:3). Maponya's Soweto Investments consortium is also planning a casino, conference and hotel project at another Soweto location. Maponya maintains that about "100 000 Sowetans would own 37.5% of the shares in the shopping centre and casino" and that this

'is true empowerment of people who were deprived during apartheid....The shopping complex and casino development will make a big difference to Soweto, bringing much-needed employment and generating tax revenues for the government and bringing tourists to Soweto, giving the place the economic heartbeat it needs' Soweto Investments [also] plans to build a hall of fame in the township to commemorate the triumph of democracy. The site would have an auditorium, archives and an education centre, Maponya said. (Leshilo 1997:3)

In responding to such claims, the critical, academic intelligence is in one sense right to be cautious about the hyperbolic figurations through which shopping malls are materialised in marketing rhetoric, press release and commercial jargon: just how many malls can be the best, the biggest, the newest, the most accessible, the paradise incarnate? Yet the corollary of partial cynicism need not be denial, or the refusal to ask questions about why it is that the shopping mall is an extremely popular form capable of eliciting from many people extremes of response often conceptualised as heroisation alongside demonisation.

The tropes through which mall space and its associated activities are discursively represented are valuable indices for the critic who wishes to explore the meanings attached to consumer culture. Let us briefly return, here, to Leshilo's strategic representation of mall and casino developer Richard Maponya in the preceding quotation. Leshilo writes as a financial journalist in the *Sunday Independent Business*, but even in pages replete with the demonstrable facticity of financial reports, spreadsheets, and unit trust pricings, we find the tropes of trailblazing and pioneering more familiar within the epic, heroic landscapes of the adventure romance. Admittedly, Leshilo is not unselfconscious about their use: his article carries the headline "Soweto shop complex 'is like a dream come true'", where the inverted commas signifying indirect speech perform a self-reflexive labour analogous to that of the figurative in his simile. However, even when so performatively staged, even when distanced from the belief that they can unproblematically communicate meaning, the tropes are present and consequential. They are linguistic figures of gigantism that have been crucial to the discourses of popular (if not academic) urban and national development. If an English Studies researcher considers these tropes to be so overused as to have become but formulaic; and if the critic of materialist

persuasion would wish to point out their glamorising of class privilege, they remain undeniably meaningful in 'the popular imagination'; repeatedly invoked in order to individualise and heroise the achievements of capitalist entrepreneurship. Indeed, they rely on people's familiarity with this form of narrativising of experience for their effect. (I consider a particular instance of such heroisation when I discuss Sol Kerzner and The Lost City in Chapter 4.) Far from being necessarily indicative of linguistic, cultural and hence ideological impoverishment and sterility, the tropic 'stereotype' perhaps retains for many people a satisfying emotional persuasiveness and explanatory power. It is a recognisable cultural formula in terms of which they feel enabled to manage a proliferation of information. Within such an interpretative frame, publicly visible and popularly usable socioeconomic development along the lines of shopping malls and leisure and entertainment facilities enunciates a modernity whose signification, while necessarily relational to that of more fundamental infrastructure such as adequate housing, schools, electricity, water and health care, far exceeds built structure.

Even when we turn to KwaZulu-Natal, a comparatively poor South African province whose urban regions have the fewest large shopping malls in South Africa, we find a plethora of new malls along with area enlargements and refurbishments of existing centres: the "Phoenix Plaza, the La Lucia Mall extension, the Bluff Centre and of course the massive Pavilion regional centre...in Westville" are among those malls singled out for comment in the mid-1990s in the local papers (*Daily News Journalist* 1995:20). To the north of the city, too, construction is soon to begin on a vast regional centre, The Gateway mall, the scope of which is intended to surpass (to rival) that of the present regional facility, The Pavilion. The perceived importance of the shopping centre or mall in retailing is suggested by the fact that Natal Newspapers, in an effort to assist retailers and advertisers in reaching their shoppers, recently commissioned the Durban Retail Library to conduct a survey into "the customer profiles, buying habits and media consumption" associated with Durban's major centres (Durban Retail Library 1996:3). We are informed that besides the 'shopping centre' formed by the Durban CBD, there are twelve major shopping centres in the greater Durban area alone: The Workshop, The Pavilion, The Wheel, Musgrave Centre, Game City, KwaMashu OK Centre, Sanlam Centre Pinetown, Section Centre, Phoenix Plaza, Chatsworth Centre, La Lucia Mall, and Berea Centre. The number is striking, given the comparatively small area in which these malls are located. But as in the case of similar quantifications of magazine readerships, the data – and indeed the form of market research agency from which they derive – are amenable to divergent interpretation. In part, they convey the will of capitalism's functionaries to survey a public as consumers so as definitively to map the parameters of a consumer market. For example, when Natal Newspapers' senior media analyst Tim Kelly announces the Durban Retail Library shopping centre survey to interested parties in the finance section of the *Sunday Times*, he feels duty-bound to convey the importance of such consumer surveys (and in effect to advertise the newspaper for which he writes) by quoting figures and data from DRL's earlier, 1995 guide: "only 22% of Musgrave Centre shoppers live on the Berea but you can reach 52% of all Musgrave Centre's shoppers by advertising in the *Sunday Tribune*" (1996:7). Kelly advises retailers: "Therefore, mass market media should be used to maximise penetration into...customer base" (1996:7). Should. Maximise. Penetration...the idiom is that of injunction and guaranteed effect, in which 'the customer' is feminised as passive recipient of another's agency. In part, though, comments such as these, and the larger market research initiative of which they are but an aspect, also carry the niggling anxiety that 'target audiences' are volatile, elusive, never altogether respectful of the storylines plotted in advertising. There is always the possibility that consumers, in other words, are never quite revealed to what the market would prefer to consider its 'omniscient' gaze. Whatever the figures quoted by Kelly,

the empirical truths of shoppers as human consumers – rather than their identities imagined and projected as ‘consumption patterns’ – remain intangible and obscure; the market and its marketing agents are not monarchs of all they survey. Accordingly, beyond conveying what is envisaged as a ‘trend’ towards the decentralisation of shoppers’ custom from centres in their immediate residential vicinity to ‘centres’ dispersed within the larger region, the Durban Retail Library figures cannot but be a form of wish-fulfilment towards more fully-realising – making ‘real’ – the cipher of the ideal consumer. As I have already indicated in Chapter 2, in what I consider to be novel analyses of the relations that characterise the consumption industry’s ‘consumption’ of representations of itself, Lurie and Warde characterise advertising and market research as “Investments in the Imaginary Consumer”. Far from merely relying on consumers as inert and easily (mis)led, these industries are involved in a “complicated dialectic between commercial and academic knowledge about the consumer and consumer culture” (1997:87). Power and knowledge are conventionally believed by theorists to be exerted by a Controlling Capital in the form of advertising over consumers who are passive even in their insatiable will to consume. But Lurie and Warde conjecture that this relationship may be recast as the struggle (and repeatedly the failure) by asymmetrically empowered advertising agent and client to exercise authority over meaning. Each is implicated in the need to secure a reified, comforting figure of the idealised (voracious yet predictable) consumer who may be represented as statistically calculable and replicable. In terms of Lurie and Warde’s argument, even the wish by countries to market evidently ‘national’ identities constitutes an attempt to assuage anxieties that stem from the increasing internationalisation and creolisation of cultural markets.

Calling up the ‘Mall Community’

What all of this suggests is that locations of consumer culture are amenable to extremely complex forms of analysis. There exists the possibility that malls, notwithstanding the vested interests of those who would manage consumer relations through survey and spatial arrangement, may be vectored into a curious ‘community’ function. This ‘community’ is not unproblematic, but it is nevertheless called into being by various agents who imagine themselves to be acting not directly in the service of Capital, and by varieties of people who visit malls for a variety of reasons.

Consider, by way of illustration, the case of those *professionals* who design malls. Despite prevalent intellectual assumptions that mall space is generically ‘elitist’, or at best trivial and bleak in its association with mass standardisation, the *design philosophy* of shopping malls may correlate with egalitarian and community-oriented assumptions. This is certainly evident in the hopes articulated by early mall designers. In *Shopping Towns USA: The Planning of Shopping Centers* (1960), for instance, Victor Gruen, eminent architect of the prototypical American mall, and his co-author, economist Mike Smith, envisage the suburban shopping centre as a communal response to the anonymity of America’s car culture. The authors suggest that by

affording opportunities for social life and recreation in a protected pedestrian environment, by incorporating civic and educational facilities, shopping centres can fill an existing void. They can provide the needed place and opportunity for participation in modern community life....If the shopping center becomes a place that not only provides suburbanites with their physical living requirements, but simultaneously serves their civic, cultural and social community needs, it will make the most significant contribution to the enrichment of our lives. (1960:23-24)

Gruen and Smith’s comments are, we notice, inflected through a subjunctive ‘if’, through possibility and future-directed longing rather than achieved actuality. Moreover, since the beginning of the 1960s when these men wrote, it has become more difficult for us to think of the mall as a social and architectural type which “can fill an existing void”. Malls are so prolific in number, so closely abutting urban and suburban commercial and residential development, that

there do not seem to be any further sociospatial 'gaps' available for them, even as developers and financiers continue to discover amid this human density actual or perceived pockets of 'lack' that invite fulfilment by retail infrastructure. Unsurprisingly, then, malls are on occasions considered even by ordinary people who do use these locations not to produce a satisfying community where once there was a 'void', but as places which *render void* important aspects of human life. In this view (one to which many of us at moments subscribe despite a willingness to consider the mall as potentially more productive space), the shopping mall is a consumerist sterility which is devoid of real human interaction and the variety to be found in the sorts of shops located on main and back streets; a site to be avoided; a cultural form which voids, whether it is built on a vast tract of land which had previously provided the visual relief of 'open space', or on the ruins of an erstwhile human habitation whose erasure was demanded by the mall's massivity.

Working with such projected loathings in mind, current mall designers might be less idealistic than Gruen and Smith. But it is possible that they retain a residual hope that their projects will fulfil some kind of popular need, and that the users of malls might attach significance to the mall as a meaningful meeting place of modern culture. Let me take but one example. Robert Bray, chief design architect of Bentel Abramson & Partners, responsible for The Pavilion, maintains that his team began with the conviction that "retail design is architecture for the people"; "a shopping centre is a statement of community life" (1994a:17). He goes on to argue that "the architecture employed should, [accordingly], be readily understood, and enjoyed, by the man-in-the mall" (1994a:17). The immediate response to this might be that there is only a tenuous connection between what is, after all, the inflated partiality of project description in a professional journal and a more difficult to calibrate ethical intention. Further, it is impossible to miss in Bray's comments the paradoxical articulations of a mall 'community': if the mall is intended to express 'community life', it somehow also creates its own self-referring collective. Further, Bray's comments present this community as masculine – albeit, probably, for the sake of the mellifluous alliteration to which I succumb in my own 'milling around the mall' of this Chapter's title. Yet many regular visitors to or users of mall space are women. (This need not be regarded as a 'factoid' gleaned from the scientific-mimicry of market research: if seeing still has potential for believing, a stroll around any shopping complex will indicate as much.) Bray's imagined, rhetorical community, then, does not intersect comfortably with the mass of real shoppers to be found in any mall space, and might well provoke questions concerning the parameters of inclusion and exclusion through which a so-called mall community is constructed. Yet even allowing for these uncertainties, Bray's comments are intriguing. They imply that through attractive design, thoughtful placement and mix, as well as regular maintenance of facilities, shopping malls can be spaces which 'afford' use value and pleasure to people. This view is appealing when set against scepticism about 'the mall' as a form which is fundamentally banal or expedient on account of its Capitalist-consumerist derivation.

The community associated with the mall is unlikely to be the more-or-less stable, securely hierarchised traditional collective recuperated by some cultural anthropologists and historians, who for all their theoretical sophistication are themselves hankering after heroically nostalgic versions of an organic, original human past envisaged as village or tribe. Considered empirically, the mall community might be relatively narrow and ephemeral – a group of individuals who know each other and are gathering for a morning's shopping and entertainment in a particular mall. Such a community is likely to meet with mere scorn from those critics convinced of the mall's insidious qualities: it touches too few people, for too little time; it excludes more than it includes. However, when considered more imaginatively, the community aspects of malls might borrow from the ideals of Karon's eulogy to Greenmarket Square: a temporary culture in which difference

is briefly contained in the space of a shared experience. This is not dissimilar from the imagined community proposed by Benedict Anderson for newspaper reading (1990). (Anderson's logic is taken to the postmodern extreme of virtual reality in an article from which I have already quoted: Morse's "The Freeway, The Mall and Television: Towards an Ontology of Everyday Distraction".)

Anderson's is a permeable, fictive community of calendrical and spatial coincidence. It is premised on a person's awareness of his/her own consumption of modern cultural forms being simultaneously related to any number of multiple consumptions elsewhere. It depends on a person's knowledge that a routine of twentieth-century urban life is being replicated by others both within and beyond visual ambit, both in the immediate vicinity and in dispersed locations. These are consumers and practices of consumption of whose existence the individual "is confident, yet of whose identity" s/he "has not the slightest notion" (1990:79). Such a shared, fictive community – what Anderson calls "that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity" (1990:79) – produces each individual as "magically alone" (1990:75) even while s/he is situated within a mass, and allows a person to be "continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life" (1990:79).

The community associated with the shopping mall, then, while imagined 'rather than' real, may legitimately fulfil for people a comforting, regulating function. Taken in this way, 'community' allows one's reservations about malls to be tempered by a tentative human hope. This is especially so if we credit ordinary people's willingness to use their built environments critically, such that the shopping or leisure community is not one merely given to hedonistic pleasure (playing neatly into the hands of those serious and seriously puritanical leftists for whom pleasure of any sort remains an index of one's immoral co-optation into an unjust status quo), but is premised also on a critical capacity. This entails an ability to judge which, while not necessarily consensual, admits ordinary people to the community of informed users of culture more usually reserved for an elite. As Cape Town architect Arnold van der Riet puts it,

the great unwashed are sustained by a real, vital sense of what their environments should be.... There is nothing strange about the questions they ask of our buildings. They look to them as human environments and interpret directly whatever evidence...they see there of the status of people and their relationships with each other.... The problem is not with the critics' supposed architectural illiteracy but rather with the inability of our buildings to speak coherently or constructively about the human condition. (1996:3)

I concede several difficulties with these comments, among them being the intimations of ahistorical transcendence ("the human condition"), the implication that popular response is by definition intuitive and unmediated ("directly"), and the rather-too-easy categorisation of the popular as comprising only "the great unwashed" rather than, say, De Certeau's "marginal majority" of which we are *all* increasingly part (1984). It would also be intellectual pretence for me to suppress the fact that Van der Riet's is a critical response to the mega-mass of Johannesburg's Hyatt Hotel, rebuked by several local architects as a monolith. This leads me to expect that Van der Riet would probably extend his criticism of what he considers to be this inhumane space to the phenomenon of the shopping mall.

Yet his claim for the relative authority of ordinary people's perceptions of architectural space is valuable in relation to an analysis of shopping malls and the meanings produced by a community of consumers. Van der Riet's approach is very different from modernist arrogance concerning the philistinism of the masses and people's inability to articulate insightful response to their lived environments. His comments carry the possibility that all people, as part of a loose consumer community not necessarily educated in architectural discourse, are entitled to make judgements about the buildings planned and erected by professionals, *and* that their judgements

may be critically astute. Expressed in a more expansive form, I would have this mean that if we are willing to allow the human element of place, there emerges the likelihood that an ill-conceived architectural blot may still acquire valuable human effect. So-called abstraction, monstrosity, triviality and the like, may be rendered meaningful spaces through the practices of pleasure, criticism and restraint which are habitually associated with individual life lived in relation to the collective structures of that vast imagined community which is society.

From a more scholarly perspective, the North American architect Kenneth Frampton comes to a similar conclusion about the possibility of a human community being produced in and through architectural form. Partly, he is disturbed by the placelessness characteristic of so much contemporary built environment: once you're in a mall or in any other 'non-place' of supermodernity like airport, subway, club, hospital, or movie house, your spatial and temporal consciousness is often experienced as suspended. You could be anywhere. Or nowhere. It could be now. Or then. Yet Frampton still finds himself reluctant to dismiss the human potential of pseudo-public places such as "recent megastructures in housing, hotels, shopping centres". As he explains, "one cannot even in these instances entirely discount the latent political and resistant potential of the place-form" (1993:276). Although his argument (like Van der Riet's) is structured explicitly around 'resistance', a problematic term to which I return near the end of the Chapter, Frampton at least perceives that a built environment can be made to release a latent critical energy: place-form can function in conjunction with human relations so as to allow people to generate meaningful appraisals of architecture and design, and indeed meaningful experience. His remarks serve as a reminder that commentary on the shopping mall needs to be open to the "potential of the place-form" *and* to the human element without which architectural place cannot become meaningful social space.²

Certainly, in working with more negative assessments of mall space as it bears on the construction of community, I cannot avoid addressing the anxieties of critics like Robert Hewison (1991) and Ken Worpole (1991). Hewison argues that the proliferation of malls cannot be considered separately from the supplanting of a democratically understood notion of leisure as education and social welfare with an elitist conception of leisure as consumption (1991:166). (In the British context within which he is writing, education and welfare have historically been the motivating force of many public leisure facilities such as museums and libraries.) Accompanying this focus on the role of capital in managing leisure pursuits, he claims, is the defining of people as consumers, a shopping public – a pseudo public – rather than as citizens. Worpole offers a similar analysis, suggesting that this emphatically consumerist mediation of identity marginalises civic responsibility, and misrepresents 'identity' as a mode of consumption, dependent on "the disposable income to buy it in the marketplace". Accordingly, 'identity' will "mirror the inequalities of wealth and power that already exist: if you can't buy it, you can't have it" (1991:147).

Of course I take these points. Yet I cannot easily reconcile Hewison's and Worpole's concerns with the more confusing probability that human identities are imagined not with separate recourse to 'citizenship' or 'consumption', but in relation to odd permutations of both subjectivities. Despite vast differences of wealth and expectation in South Africa between super-rich and unemployed, and without my wanting to endorse a facile conception of a rainbow nation consumer body, it does seem important to acknowledge, rather than deny, that *all* South Africans are in various ways both actually and aspirationally consumers and citizens. An anecdotal degree of 'evidence' for such intersection lies in party political bids to rally voters in the run-up to the 1996 regional elections in KwaZulu-Natal. The leaders of several major parties and their entourages staged media circuses at local shopping centres during peak weekend shopping

periods: The Inkatha Freedom Party's Mangosuthu Buthelezi visited The Pavilion; the National Party's F.W. de Klerk the Phoenix Plaza; and the ANC's Nelson Mandela the Chatsworth Centre (*Daily News Journalists* 1996:2). Both the prime time Saturday news on SABC 3, and that week's front page of the regional Sunday newspaper, the *Sunday Tribune*, also covered the events (*Sunday Tribune Journalists* 1996:1). We cannot deduce, from this, what prominent politicians or other individuals *personally* think of malls; and we can only conjecture concerning each party's choice of particular mall venue. Yet it seems reasonable to infer that 'the shopping mall' has at least been identified as a significant, popular space of urban life, one attracting a consumer constituency which is simultaneously the political constituency which might mandate regional (and by extension, national) government initiatives. Whatever the expediency of the politicians' mall visits, people appeared in televisual and print images of the occasions to be at once surprised and well-satisfied to discover the nation's leaders mixing with 'the masses' in ordinary, not overtly political venues.

Malls and History: Drawing on Past, Present and Future Stories

In further making a case for the mall as meaningful cultural form, I want now to address the matter of malls and history. The topic has three related facets which I prefer, for the sake of clarity, to discuss under separate sub-headings which are given in bold underline type. Firstly, I make the often disregarded points that (a) individual malls have histories in that they have changed over time, and (b) that these intersect curiously with the histories, the narratives of time and space, that shoppers attach to them. They are present in people's recollections (and sincerely felt fabrications) of particular locations in relation to their own life stories. Secondly, I discuss some of the problems and possibilities of 'history' as a form of theming in retail and leisure. For if malls as blank boxes have evoked critical scorn, so too have attempts at achieving distinctiveness and depth through theme, especially when the theme purports to be 'historical'. Here, my particular focus is on the Victorian-colonial style which is popular in South African mall design. Thirdly, calling on history in its conventional capacity as supposedly authentic pastness, I consider some of the meanings which may be attached to the renovation of historically significant buildings for the purpose of retail and leisure. My specific example is that of a late-nineteenth-century railway workshop in Durban. The design and marketing of what became 'The Workshop' shopping centre entail a strategic attribution of value to what is at once historical truth and contemporary invention.

Individual Histories: Sanlam Centre and The Wheel

'Monumentality' is a frequently-invoked generic criticism of the shopping mall form. As my comments on Maponya will have implied, developers tend to use a discourse of monumentality in attempting to secure for their projects the preferred meanings of progressive entrepreneurship and social stature. In many cases, this epic language is literally embodied in highly visible built structure which, in the language of De Certeau (1984), aggressively assumes power over a location, claims and possesses both space and the viewer's perception.

A related generic criticism of the mall is 'newness': malls are superficially modern, they allow for no patina, no real historical depth. As Fiske would have it, the

plethora of shiny surfaces, the bright lights, the pervasive use of glass and mirrors all serve to make both the commodities and the center itself appear brand new....It all adds up to an overwhelming image of newness, a place with no space for the old, the shabby, the worn – no place for the past, only an invitation to the future. (1989:39-40)

It is easy, of course, to make connections between 'newness' and a commodity culture's imperative towards consumption in the repeated display of novelty and the search for uniqueness. I myself explore such arguments in relation to modernity, women and women's magazines in Chapter 2. Yet the inverse position is less spectacularly visible, and therefore more difficult for the critic to occupy. As I see it, Fiske's case is marked by significant lacunae. He does not allow, for instance, that any mall, however monolithic, has polyvalent histories in much the same way that the subjectivities of individuals are malleable rather than fixed. Centres *do* get old, uneasily revealing their design histories. They become worn. Shabby. Too small. Threatened by a neighbouring complex. They are renewed, rejuvenated, extended; resited in the public imagination via media coverage, leaflets, word-of-mouth. Malls regularly undergo evolutions of space, style, tenant mix and colour, all of which emplace the mall into relations with space and with people which are at once new, but also bear traces of the past. Similarly, research into the symbolic archaeologies of individual centres might unearth important information about the changing aspirational and factual narratives which have been held by people within the particular mall catchment areas. Take the case of the Umbilo Sanlam Centre, a small neighbourhood shopping centre which was crucial to my own experience of 'the mall' as a child and a young adolescent. When this centre was built it was a local landmark that embodied for a relatively poor neighbourhood all the glamorous promise of a life that could be improved through saving, and then spending. Even into adulthood, I continued to refer to this mall as 'The Sanlam Centre' when giving directions, naively unaware that the name 'Sanlam' designated the mall's financier, rather than the mall itself, or that centres similarly-named after this financial giant existed in other South African suburbs like Pinetown, or Queensburgh. 'The Sanlam Centre' was not the figure of an alienating Capital in our midst, but a site of self-discovery. It was to this centre that we went for a hamburger treat at The Wimpy, a burger ranch-cum-take-a-way that was situated in our childish imaginations as a 'restaurant' and which, excitingly, remained open till 9pm on a Friday night. It was at 'The Sanlam Centre' that my mother, after months of downpayment and accompanied by two ecstatic little girls, finally arranged for the delivery of a 'painting' (a large and luridly-coloured print of a boy labelled Toby, inconsolably weeping gelatinous tears), a 'Forest Floor' 9 by 12 lounge carpet, and a matching, three-seater 'Moorish Castle' lounge suite. Equally memorably, it was on a Christmas eve at 'The Sanlam Centre' that the same mother, in front of curiously immobilised onlookers, intervened in a brawl between an angry white man and a black security guard, an heroic skirmish which resulted in the added excitement of discussions with mall management, interviews in police stations and a protracted courtroom drama in which she made the speech of her passionately liberal life.

But these are mere anecdotes, aren't they, not history? And they are certainly not the 'history' of this shopping centre, which would entail detailed accounts of investment proposals, site clearance, and tenant management. But whatever the importance of such factual records of Capital's expansion into then-white, comparatively poor-yet-privileged suburbia, critics eager to foreground the complicity of malls in modernity and consumption wittingly erase from the visible and apparently Master History a welter of minor but meaningful meta histories. If such histories are not collectively carried within the consciousnesses of every shopper, and are not even invoked at each moment of shopping by the individuals who piece them together from memories of past visits, these narratives are important. They exist erratically; in occulted, fragmented ways. Unrecorded in books, untabled in council documentation, and not dramatically available for mass consumption, these little stories nevertheless contribute to the meanings which particular malls, and indeed 'the mall', accrue in individual imaginations. And the development histories and the individual histories do intersect, however unsettling this may be for what proponents of each

would prefer to retain as the historical truth of a particular mall location. Umbilo's Sanlam Centre, for example, both is and is no longer; and this paradox is attributable to more than the fact that the child who was once so enamoured of this shopping centre is, similarly, both with me and metamorphosed. For Umbilo has been repositioned in the imaginations of a Durban public. It is no longer 'merely' a downmarket, blue collar, 'Corporation Housing Estate' suburb inferior to the abutting Glenwood and Glenmore, but the site of a new history of upwardly mobile dreams and suburban aspiration. Estate agent advertising focusses on the affordability of homes in the area, on gazumphing and evident house-pride, and on the fact that many young professionals eager to enter the home-ownership market consider Umbilo their point of entry. Not surprisingly, the local shopping centre has been recruited in the service of this narrative. The Umbilo Sanlam Centre has been gentrified; re-marketed as 'The Queensmead Mall', with postmodernised terracotta and teal facade, tiled courts and an expanded range of facilities, tenants and clients. Despite a constant floor area, and human evidence of its down-at-heel past, this mall *is* looking different, and it's looking towards a different future, with an economically and racially mixed clientele. What would I – or critics like Fiske – prefer? Even in this overtly capitalist newness – what De Certeau might call the "empire of the evident" (1984:203) – there are surely human beings making their present and imagined future histories. These histories constitute a fragmentary, layered, often metaphorical legibility which suggests that space is riven by complexity and that spatial histories are radically heterogeneous. Instead of reading space merely as the obvious disclosure of a Master Presence (the tendency among critics whose interpretations privilege Capital), we might allow that "the revolutions of history, economic mutations, demographic mixtures lie in layers within it, and remain there, hidden in customs, rites, and spatial practices" which are not simply to be read off the surface of the built structure (De Certeau 1984:201).

Another interesting example of mall history is that of Durban's The Wheel shopping centre. (See Figure 4.ii.) In The Wheel, when shoppers visit retail, food and recreational facilities their design environment, depending on the floor and the floor section in which they find themselves, is that of schooners, casbahs, English rusticity, little Italy, and tropical island. Or, this is the case if I am deciphering the massively disjunctive codes with any accuracy. (Shevlin refers to the "bewildering mix of decorating styles, which ranges from nautical and Middle Eastern to high tech" [1996:12].) The Wheel's architects remark that the interiors and decoration of this centre follow the frivolous logic of a theme park (Bray 1994a:19): a gaudy and hybrid style which many high cultural critics might regard as an inappropriate importation of North American Disney imagineering, devoid of regional and temporal specifics. Ahistorical, in other words; geographically displaced. Crass rather than culturally authentic. It is the extravagantly themed environment, I suggest, which is likely to dissuade critics of The Wheel from granting serious attention to the shifting histories of the area in which The Wheel is located. Consider the remarks of Shevlin, in a piece subtitled "As the Stomach Turns". While she makes a number of pertinent points about The Wheel's poor floor plan, her response emphasises what she considers to be the mall's tacky style. The

disturbingly eclectic mishmash of ornamentation to the external walls of the centre, which includes a giant ferris wheel, is particularly distasteful. These superficial applications of icons, symbols and devices, possibly intended to lull a post-modern layman into a spending coma, are debasing, patronising and ugly....[The Wheel] could not fail to depress anyone with even a modicum of good taste. (1996:12)

Certainly, The Wheel is not elegant in the manner of malls in Johannesburg's northern suburbs. Yet in devising as it were an archaeology of The Wheel's design style, we should not forget the layered dimensions of the Point's history as part of Durban's popular beachfront. For instance,

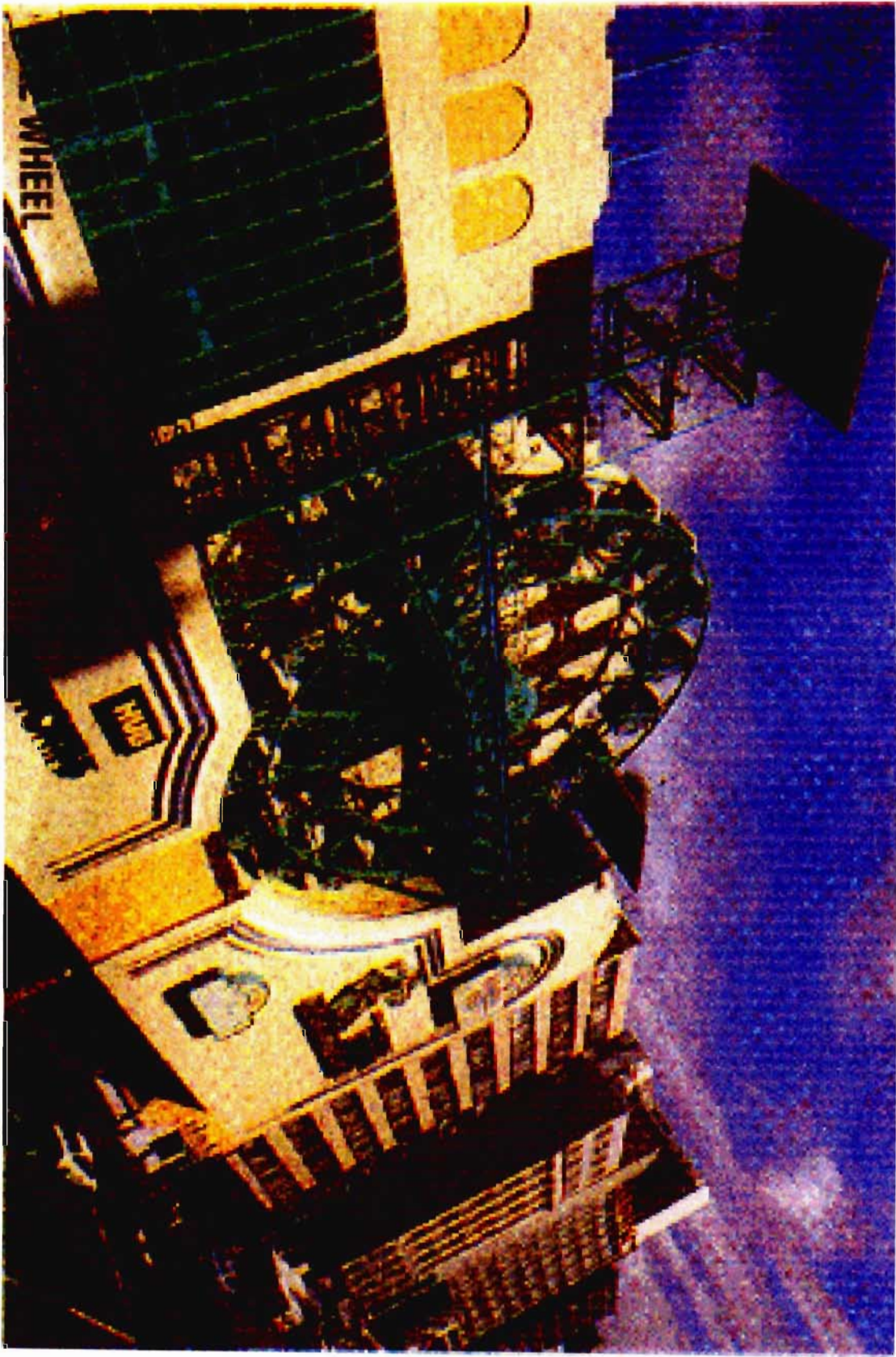


Figure 4.ii

it is the beach area of the city (a liminal zone on the margins of the serious civic concourse) which has over time been devoted especially to the pursuit of leisure along the lines of amusement arcades, funfairs, take-away venues, a range of tourist hotels, paddling pools and brothels. Although this is severely to over-simplify, there is surely some truth in considering such sites and practices as a residually carnivalesque embodiment of so-called popular pleasures, however middle class, some would say hegemonic, their present forms.

In interpreting the meta-textuality of The Wheel's 'themepark' theme, Tony Bennett proves useful. In "The Exhibitionary Complex", he suggests that popular pleasures such as fair grounds and markets were, with the formalisation of the exhibitionary complex in world fairs and exhibitions, subjected to management, control and regulation. Even the fair's increasing reliance on mechanical rides and entertainments allowed it to be recuperated within discourses of industrial progress (1988:86). Nevertheless, he points out, fairs retained something of the unruliness which had been evident in the riotous behaviour of patrons and the touting of freakish monstrosities, both of which transgressed the boundaries of bourgeois propriety, threatening the rationality of ordered display and conduct. The resilience of the carnival is attested to by the fact that the very ordered displays of the exhibitions gradually came to grant space to 'fair zones' which formed ideological 'midways' between official and informal versions of popular culture. So order (or the desire for order) abutted jumble; and instruction in the society of the spectacle co-existed with frivolous participation (Bennett 1988:87). Yet as Bennett argues in another paper on the coastal pleasure resort of Blackpool in northern England (1986), it is inadequate to valorise pockets of residual carnival in modern forms of popular recreation, as if the carnivalesque were of itself ideologically progressive. Instead, he reminds us of Bakhtin's particular interest in the creatively *transformative* aspects of carnival, where Bakhtin says of Rabelais, for instance, that in striving to erect a culture for practices such as eating and drinking, he sought to make them *respectable*. In other words, through language and its realisation in social structure, an initially iconoclastic carnival is influenced by physical and conceptual forms of middle class rationality, sobriety, orderliness. All of these, too, are configured as testimony to the virtues of progress and an attendant normalisation of everyday life through routine. Simultaneously, though, these enlightenment structures are constantly modified through their proximity to and protracted struggles with a pervasive popular inclination to carnival. The very forms of carnival that they would manage and dismantle repeatedly appear within their boundaries. Bennett, like so many analysts of contemporary consumer culture, is unsure quite what to make of this. He claims that discourses such as these are "ultimately contained within the discourse of modernity", but also wishes to allow that the 'text of pleasure' prevailing at Blackpool does not itself automatically produce or guarantee the way it will be responded to or negotiated by the pleasure-seeker" (1986:151).

This uneasy co-existence of policing and pleasure is one worth pursuing in relation to the beachfront area in which The Wheel is situated. Durban's beachfront is ever-more visibly syncretic in its human mix, having become a place of business and of pleasurable escape for upcountry and international tourists, and for a local population that refuses the convenient homogenisation of the categorisation 'middle class'. Such syncretism means cultural vibrancy – of the sort pointed to by Karon in his discussion of Greenmarket Square – but it also represents potentially violent transgression. The threat of unruliness in a culturally disparate popular body has meant the deployment, along the beachfront promenades and streets proper, of a visible police presence, as well as an added investment, by the city council and the tourist management infrastructure, in methods of 'pleasurable instruction'. Through pictorially-representative signage, the monitorial ministrations of uniformed 'Beach Guides', vigilant life guards with loud hailers,

the provision of formal curio trading sites and even 'clinics' which offer lessons in boogie boarding and surfing, beach patrons are educated into the forms of leisure behaviour that are considered appropriate to the comparatively liberated, bodily zone of 'the beach'. Yet whatever its restrictions upon the individual, this discursive machinery of the modern Durban beachfront is widely experienced as pleasurable. It is carnival regulated, but in the very form of control resides the potential for a democratically extended fun.

What we might also recall is that the liberation of the beachfront has only been achieved through complex intersections of pleasure and politics. In the late 1980s, for example, it was Durban's Addington Beach, the beach closest to The Wheel, which was deliberately occupied by a large, multiracial crowd in a drama of democratic, passive resistance. Part sit-in, part play-in and swim-in, this was a literal demonstration of some South Africans' ability and desire to take pleasure in what was then a prohibited form of mingling. The Durban beachfront had long been popular with many white South Africans (the city was envisaged by some as South Africa's premier popular coastal resort), but it had not, until the late 1980s, been a pleasure zone open to all: national legal regulation and related civic prohibition exerted close control over the pleasurable body. It took much for the fairground to be made more fair; for the official discourses of apartheid government, town planning and management to admit the dialogism of those unofficial and ever-more popular voices which were demanding access not only to the sociality of the beaches, but also to that of the modern city beyond. Whatever the conventionalisation of regular beachfront entertainments and their formalisation into licit, rather than carnivalesque structures, in the Addington Beach sit-in I recollect relishing the thrill of the illicit when joining thousands of other very ordinary, not necessarily radical Durbanites in a mass occupation of the beach. We were simply making visible a conviction that beaches – as representative instances of the domains of both pleasure and politics – should be open to all South Africans. The popular pageantry of a multicoloured crowd was integral to the enjoyment that many people seemed to experience in this highly charged political moment. Important, too, was the brooding presence of 'the boys in blue', mostly young, crew-cut, baton-wielding policemen. However much this response reduced complex econo-political structures to the instance of manageable individual 'evil', many in the crowd delighted in mocking these out-of-place figures of authority: they were freaks, aliens, monstrous agents of a monstrous system intent on denying people their human rights and their rightly human pleasures. The beach occupation, then, was politics as circus, as entertaining participatory spectacle, and it is inseparable, for me, from the highly managed fairground idiom of The Wheel. Of course, the theming of this mall cannot, in itself, visibly narrativise such personal meanings; nor can it make evident the paradoxes of politics and pleasure that are associated with the area of Durban in which The Wheel shopping centre is located. Yet the possibility exists, at least, that the themepark identity of The Wheel is curiously apposite, redolent of deeper histories than the mere cursory, cynical glance is willing to acknowledge. Significantly, too, the current history and the imagined future of the Point are themselves vectored into various forms of labour in the service of leisure. The Point is presently part of ambitious and protracted plans of urban redevelopment. The area is set to become Durban's 'Point Waterfront', an enterprise which has meant cautious negotiations with local ANC representatives so as to secure approval for a project that is touted as being for all of Durban's people, rather than an exclusive group. It has also entailed fractious debate about the alleged preferment of foreign (Malaysian and German) investors over local money. At any rate, multi-million rand proposals have been lodged to redeploy the Point area as a sophisticated waterfront entertainment and leisure facility that would put Durban on the tourist map, and bring the city from beneath Cape Town's shadow. It is further proposed that the Point be linked to the opposite Bluff shoreline via

a funicular, and to the Victoria Embankment and marina via a monorail and series of pedestrian malls. This rejuvenation of Durban's Point area – with a restaurant in the Old Battery, an extensive fleamarket and proposals for shopping facilities that refer to the colonial history and building styles of the area – also implies that history is a highly marketable commodity, repeatedly brought into new conjunctures with the demands of the present. Indeed, it is often history which provides the design logic for many locations of leisure, whether as restoration or as more obvious fictionalising of the past.

The De-Realising of History? The Pavilion

As in the case of The Wheel, the theming of mall space may entail the most adventurous, rampant borrowings from disparate ages and places. Within this polysemous design narrative, accordingly, history frequently appears not as authentically recoverable fact, but as creative style. Especially familiar to literary-cultural practitioners are Jameson's claims that the producers of culture under the postmodern dominant of late capitalism "have nowhere to turn but the past: the imitation of dead styles, [and] speech through all the masks and voices stored up in the imaginary museums of a now global culture" (1993:74). History is considered to be reduced to commodity, here; it is inevitably depthless, and open for use in the realms of commercial culture merely as the most banalised pastiche.³ Something of this sort is also implied in Fiske's criticism of the fundamental 'newness' of mall space, to which I have already referred. As we recollect, Fiske contends that in the generic mall "both the commodities and the center itself appear brand new....It all adds up to an overwhelming image of newness, a place with no space for the old, the shabby, the worn – no place for the past" (1989:39-40). Neither Fiske nor Jameson, it seems, despite the latter's theorisation of a 'shallow' invocation of the past as historically explicable within late capitalism, would be willing to endorse the imaginative reworkings of history as 'theme'.

What other kinds of comments might be made, however, about history as 'theme', about history manifest as style rather than as documented fact? In taking on this subject, my point is not to misrepresent the possibility that, for many people, an enjoyment of a location's sense of place and themed space does not directly depend on their responding analytically to the historical or ahistorical character of the venue. They may enjoy – or feel aversion to – what is perceived simply as the arrangement of spatial components and the design idiom. Yet it is also possible that many people *do* recognise in the explicitly historical theming of built environment allusions to the cultural histories of particular times and countries.

Particularly popular in the contemporary South African context (although not without international precedent both in Britain and erstwhile commonwealth nations like Canada and Australia) is a 'Victorian' design idiom that consciously mimics colonial style. In fact, there seems to have been a prolific reinvention of British colonial forms in South Africa from the late 1980s, roughly coincident with impending sociopolitical change. What might this mean? From one perspective, the valorisation of a reworked Victorianism hardly seems promising.

Let me proceed by turning to more contemporaneous rather than contemporary injunctions against colonial-Victorian style. Even in its infancy, South African Victorianism invited disapproval from Herbert Baker, perhaps the country's pre-eminent architect. It was one thing to appreciate the achievements of the historical phenomenon of architectural Victorianism in the South African colonial context: the prismatic glass skylights, exposed steel trusses, prefabricated iron shopfronts, barrel-vaulted arcades, and cast-iron lamps of late-nineteenth-century Johannesburg were a tribute to the remarkably modern achievements of the age's industrial technology. But the same could not be said of a superficially decorative Victorian design idiom. Baker characterised the Victorian *style* of many of South Africa's buildings as quaint, small-time,

provincial; an undignified bric-a-brac difficult to differentiate from colonial Victorianisms the worldover (Chipkin 1993:40).

Baker would probably not think too highly of the freestyle interpretations of Victorian design that have become popular in the theming of South Africa's built environment since the late 1980s. The interpretations tend toward the formulaic and even stereotypical, in the sense that they rely on, and I would argue popularise, those aspects of Victorian architecture that are easily recognisable. In the themed location, Victorianism may appear in its provincial, domestic form (green-corrugated iron roofing, broekie lace, verandahs etc), or in a more metropolitan, public form (glass vaulted domes, detailed exterior brickwork, vast steel supports etc). Combinations of the two are common, and exist in both commercial and residential developments: The Victoria and Alfred Waterfront, The Pavilion, The Heritage Market, The Colony, Victoria West townhouses, and the Mount Moreland and Augusta Country Estates. Instances are plentiful. The Heritage Market in Hillcrest, outside Durban, is publicised through reference to the domestic variant, with winding paths, rose gardens, trelliswork, wraparound verandahs, green roofs, features which are used to connote a relaxed, charming, traditional, family-oriented atmosphere. The Maynard Mall in Wynberg, Cape Town, exemplifies the grander, urban version of a Victorian built form, and this too is mobilised in late-1980s media publicity. The anonymous compiler of *Femina* magazine's consumer newsbrief, for instance, cites the Maynard Mall as "Neo-Victorian" and "a triumph of human scale architecture. The strong Victorian influence is seen in glass barrel-vaults, cast-iron railings and skylights which create a wonderful setting for exciting boutiques and two large department stores" (*Femina* Journalist 1988:11). The barrel-vaulted skylight is a form especially conducive to commercial display: its original 'Victorianism' seems to have become a typical feature of shopping centre architecture, in evidence at malls from Chatsworth, Durban to West Edmonton, Alberta.

Bearing in mind Baker's disapproval, yet hoping to discover a more informal set of opinions about the possible appeals of quasi-Victorian styles, I dangled a few questions about 'Victorian' theming among family, colleagues, friends. As was the case with Hermes's (1995) interviewing of women's magazine readers, the responses were often stumbling, rather than eloquent; they were piecemeal and sometimes even confused. I was, after all, asking people to untangle a cultural repertoire which they may well have habituated through modes of everyday distraction. Yet the responses were enlightening. The conversations got off to an unsettling start, with a number of respondents confirming 'my worst fears'. A frequent response-type from several white people, indeed, is typified by the comments of a woman who said, "Well, to tell you the truth, I feel more comfortable, more at home, you know, with our type of style rather than their African patterns. It's part of our history, so why shouldn't we like it?" Us/them. Ours/theirs: this under the ambit of a nation which was widely affirming itself as a reinvented, rainbow people. Not surprisingly, I found myself thinking that if theme is considered by some critics to be merely superficial excrescence, some people see in historical theming gestures to a regional or metropolitan, 'African' or 'European' past. And in the volatile South African context this meant considering the extent to which this pastness would be associated in people's imaginations with the repressions and inequalities of colonial-apartheid orders. Was it the case, for instance, that developers imagined 'Victorianism' to vector local forms of consumer space into a 'purely' decorative colonial history, where 'colonialism' is manifest as an attractive sense of idealised traditional European pastness somehow not imagined to occur within a frame conjunctural with colonial exploitation? Did a colonial theming attest to the authoring and authorising by Capital, traditionally a white South African preserve, of narratives with which mainly white people would

have an affiliation? Did I need to be wary of the extent to which certain forms of historical quotation were inherently ideologically conservative?

Since a critical equivocation is fundamental to the method of my Thesis, I found myself replying to my own questions in the manner of 'both/and', and 'yes/but', and working to understand that a Victorian design reference is not linearly associated with a conservative ideology, but that it may have unanticipated, as well as predictable, concomitants. As it happens, a way forward lay in the fact that my conversations concerning 'a Victorian theme' revealed that people understood the theming through a range of responses. Many responses, for example, are typified by ideological richness (confusion, if you will), rather than by culturally narrow convictions. Initially, many respondents affected a cynical distance from theming as an overworked retail device, since it was assumed that I, as a 'progressive' person and an 'academic' researcher, would undoubtedly consider such theming trivial. I was being told what people thought I wished to hear. At some point in the discussions, though, several people referred to a Victorian style as also forming a pleasant respite from the financially-constrained, and hence fairly unimaginative architecture and design that were their lot as 'ordinary' people. Historical styles, in this frame of reference, were frequently said to facilitate in the shopper a mood potentially able to alleviate boredom, or dull domesticity, or the stressful pressures of the present. Some respondents even acknowledged themselves to be intermittently and erratically affected by theme. They were neither here nor there about certain small design features, but 'quite liked' or even 'loved' the overall drama of a mall which presented its identity to the public through the refractions of the historical. This gesture towards history they labelled effective and 'evocative', in keeping with their preferred imagining of shopping as pleasurable escape even when it might in fact have been merely part of the domestic chores.

For some white, English-speaking South Africans, it seems, a Victorian design idiom intersects with their ill-articulated yet sincerely *felt* need to construct differentiated senses of identity: these might be conceived of as 'true' cultural identities in the midst of the Africanisation of South African life, or as more personal identities which imaginatively project the individual as a person to whom exciting, pleasurable, and noteworthy experiences regularly happen. For some, the mall themed through a Victorian-colonial referent is the most up-to-date, meaningful and different instance of a retail form which has often been inhumanely blank or at best a superficially embellished 'shed'. If the possibilities cannot be exhaustively enumerated, at least it is worthwhile to admit that the theming of a mall along Victorian historical lines may be ambiguously invested with meaning: the representation of the past may be related to the present in unexpected ways, especially since 'the mall' often visibly displays the past as exhibitionary exuberance and optimistic economic exchange, both of which continue popularly to be associated with the lineaments of contemporaneity.

A dramatic South African example of Victorian retail theming is The Pavilion, near Durban, KwaZulu-Natal's largest, first regional shopping centre. (See Figure 4.i.) As I have indicated, in its monumentality The Pavilion embodies the blocked, bulky architecture of the early-twentieth-century American mall prototype which has for many people come to typify 'the mall', and which for many critics is inextricably associated with the inhumane material and discursive systems of capitalism. Yet the massively modern, even modernist character of The Pavilion is also intersected by more recent, some might say postmodernist trends in retail-leisure planning: trends towards historically-allusive thematicised environments.

Theme may be a 'global trend', but for design architects Bentel Abramson, when considered in the South African context the Victorian-derived theming is a declarative aspect of The Pavilion's distinctiveness on a national scale: "the boldness of its themed character is...likely to

become the design benchmark for retail architecture in the country for many years to come” (Bray 1994b:16). However, given my previous remarks about history as theme, we should not be startled to discover that negative assessments of The Pavilion take issue with the attempt to revitalise retail architecture’s preferred block structure through metaphorically allusive design referents. For some, the extravagant theming of The Pavilion is a gross example of the ability of Capital, in relation to the built environment, to standardise, regularise, and hence somehow diminish the variety of human life. In terms of this argument, instead of fostering mall space as a potential reworking of community, the designers of malls and pseudo-public space “attack the crowd by homogenizing it” (Davis 1990:257). Clearly, this view does not grant mall visitors much agency. It assumes that theming occurs partly because imaginatively impoverished consumers need it, or, at any rate, that when people are within the themed environment, they lose both sense and any sense of individuality.

Most obvious in criticism of The Pavilion’s Victorian theming is its ‘Imperial’ mood: this is considered a culturally imperious anachronism in a South Africa moving towards a re-evaluation of ‘Eurocentric’ histories. Overall, critics seem unwilling to admit the *felt* appeal of The Pavilion’s imagined referents: either because the implied history is thought to be not demonstrably in keeping with currently favoured discourses of democracy, or because a themed history as concretised in the form of mall architecture is invariably thought to be banal. Let’s take a closer look at some of this. When viewed from the freeway, from the parking lot, from the walkways, it is less likely to be the analogy of ‘Pavilion:fortress’ that occupies the mind’s eye, than that of the consumer spectacle. Up close, the imperial Victorian identity of The Pavilion is difficult to miss: the domes are impressively detailed and intriguingly patinated; the multiple entrances are strategically announced by palm avenues and overscaled waterscaped follies; a windy day sets afluttering the phalanxes of otherwise ordinary advertising flags in a scene redolent of spectacle and ceremony. Splendid domes, magnificent palms, stately flags...all of these are images of England’s Empire at its height, a pageantry widely popularised in the televisual, filmic and print media. If the Victorian glass-and-iron phenomenon imitated in the architecture of The Pavilion was not the only remarkable spatial solution to the “nineteenth-century search for quality in pomp and show, in bombast and sheer size”, it was the form which had the most “effect on the nineteenth-century mind” (Raeburn 1984:221) in its visible testimony to both national achievements and to an era on the brink of modernity. In fact, the chief design architect explains that even in massive structure, The Pavilion “building was themed on traditional Victorian colonial planning and [masonry] massing” (Bray 1994b:15), and that the interior mallscape continues the themed language of the external building envelope. ‘Theme’ in other words, is not appended effect, so much as fundamental concept. The ‘Victorianism’ extends from the “elegant shopfronts and lush vegetation in the areas of the feature courts” (Lawrence 1992:31), to the Egyptian-tomb styling in the basement cinema complex, a reinterpretation of the nineteenth-century fascination for Egyptianism which derived from British archaeological discoveries of Egyptian antiquities and which, used as decorative component in various forms of Victorian culture, was intended as symbolic signifier of the modernity and stature of Victorian civilisation.

The most obvious architectural Victorian allusions in the mallscape are the glass domes and the heavily embellished “exposed structural steel detailing of the ‘conservatory’, ... [an] aesthetic inspired by precedents such as The Crystal Palace of Sir Joseph Paxton and the spatial and decorative qualities of Victorian railway stations” (Bray 1994a:17). The primary idiom of The Pavilion, then, expresses the allied nineteenth-century architectural forms of the arcade, the conservatory, the exhibition hall, the department store, the enclosed commercial concourse – all

of which created a new type of public promenade by throwing glass and iron covers over streets and squares. The glass roof, while widely disdained among architects of the day as a type of 'shed' suitable only for functional locations such as markets and stations (Jordan 1969:295) has become a hallmark of the Victorian era, easily recognisable in style, and particularly adaptable to current retail design. In adjudging the appropriateness or otherwise of the historically-derived theme of The Pavilion, the continuing usefulness of this innovation is surely one we should not forget. The "great congregating space covered in glass and iron" is considered by many to be "the most important built contribution to urban culture in the nineteenth century" (Jordan 1969:295). It is a form which, for the first time, allowed the airy enclosure of people *en masse*, and not for a specific ritual as in cathedral or theatre. The 'enclosure' was designed "to give the greatest freedom 'under one roof' – a phrase which links socio-economic ideas of fraternity in the free market, with the engineering brilliance in the literal accomplishment of the shelter" (Raeburn 1984:220).

These ideas reached their apogee in The Crystal Palace, which the design architects repeatedly cite as The Pavilion's most obvious progenitor. A closer look at The Crystal Palace, here, might help us to construct The Pavilion's thematic reference as interesting, rather than merely trite, curiously appropriate rather than necessarily anachronistic. As is well-known, The Crystal Palace was a combination of garden-party elegance and railway engineering, built in London's Hyde Park to house the Great Exhibition of 1851. In a scale meant by Paxton to pay subtle tribute to the extraordinary modernity of Britain in 1851, the building measured a symbolic 1,851 feet. The very contents and purpose of the Great Exhibition which was housed at The Crystal Palace were similarly invested with figurative meaning. The exhibition

brought together an ensemble of disciplines and techniques of display that had been developed within the previous histories of museums, panoramas, Mechanics' Institute exhibitions, art galleries and arcades. In doing so, it translated these into exhibitionary forms which, in simultaneously ordering objects for public inspection and ordering that the public inspected, were to have a profound and lasting influence on the subsequent development of museums, art galleries, expositions and department stores. (Bennett 1988:74)

The success of the Great Exhibition encouraged a rage for universal exhibitions all over Europe and the United States, which some might be inclined to read as yet further evidence of cultural imperialism. Nineteenth-century British Imperialism, in its more brutal forms, undoubtedly made material the violent metaphors invoked by Slessor to critique what she considers to be the pillaged architectural idiom of The Pavilion. In a series of comments initially published in *Architectural Review* and given wider currency in Shevlin's article on 'architectural blots' in the lifestyle magazines of South African Sunday papers, Slessor insists that the architects of The Pavilion, searching for an appropriate idiom for a mega mall in "the former Crown Colony of Natal", stooped "to ruthlessly ransack English architectural history" (1995:21), wrenching a repertoire from The Crystal Palace. Her emotive choice of 'pillaging' and 'ransack' implies the cultural barbarism characteristic of an heroic, even imperial Capitalism. And even in the structures associated with nineteenth-century forms of exhibitionary complex, most of which sought visibly to demonstrate the technical-cultural superiority of metropolitan civilisation, the occluded 'imperial' dynamic is thought by some to be the ideological violence that is inevitably attendant upon the hierarchic arrangement of cultures into primitive artefactual and technologically modern modes. But in all this the exhibition as an offshoot of imperial endeavour also instituted an important new kind of power, one premised not on blunt force, but on persuasive conduct. In this innovative social space, the audience was idealised as both the subject and the beneficiary of powerful social forces. In other words, exhibitions such as that at The Crystal Palace were motivated by both democratising and regimenting impulses. The exhibitionary complex involved

“the transfer of objects and bodies from the enclosed and private domains in which they had previously been displayed...to a restrictive public” – cabinets of curiosities and princely museums, for instance – “into progressively more open and public arenas” (Bennett 1988:74).

In seeking to establish the validity or otherwise of The Pavilion’s architectural idiom in contemporary South Africa, it is also inadequate to contend that the designers made crass use of what was, in its original, historical context, a *respectable* architectural idiom. Slessor objects to Bentel Abramson’s design on the grounds that it is but a “vulgar petrification of Paxton [which] is carried out with negligible sensitivity and an arrogant disregard for history” (1995:21). But it is a misrepresentation to imagine that in nineteenth-century England the architecture of Paxton’s Crystal Palace was conventional, or beyond aesthetic dispute. Certainly, some considered it an eponymous elegance, but for others it was distasteful, vulgar in the extreme. After all, the name ‘Crystal Palace’ was endowed by the satirical magazine *Punch* in mockery of Paxton’s attempt to construct in glass the ideals and apparent infinities of a new architectural space given over to the accumulation and display of Victorian modernity to an extended public. Paxton envisaged The Crystal Palace to be the first great official building to omit all references to past styles and, as a home-made engineer rather than an architect, he refused the ‘immoral’ dressing up of a facade with traditional ornament, opting instead for glassed halls. These he considered the concretisation of modernity, and in their shape, structure and size, they were to be experienced by visitors as visionary incarnations of an infinite progress and an infinitely progressive British civilisation.

When the prefabricated units were dismantled and relocated after six months, Paxton rebuilt The Crystal Palace in much more eclectic style with “a medieval court... and others of Greece, Rome, Pompeii, Byzantium, the Romanesque, the Alhambra, the Renaissance and Egypt, all faithfully reproduced on top of the suspended timber-plank floor, among the exotic palms and below the cast iron openweb beams and patent glazing” (Raeburn 1984:225). In its second form, then, The Crystal Palace could be said to have moved towards the popularisation of history as entertainment. Crystal Palace Mark II provided far more explicit architectural testament to the hybrid range of its earlier audience and cultural display: it went popular in embodying a pervasive Victorian interest in syncretic past histories and cultures as they attested to the style and stature of an Empire ‘on the brink’ of a new age. If the earlier logic – nationalism as a centrifugal ideology holding together disparate products and resources in an image of Empire – had been a metonym for national achievement imagined as ‘the British Empire’, subsequent logics paradoxically constructed this nationalism also as a *transnational* modernity capable of offering ‘to all’ the pleasures of ‘the world’. Once again, this involves an interplay of democracy and dominance: visual containment of the world, but an extending of the world to vastly more people than had previously been imagined possible.⁴

It should be clear from these comments that both The Crystal Palace structure and the Great Exhibition which it housed involved often contradictory attempts to confine and to democratise display. In its day, The Crystal Palace was recuperated through discourses of invention and difference, democracy and collective aspiration which are remobilised in the siting of The Pavilion in a public imagination. Like Paxton, The Pavilion architects have imagined themselves able to cast typical features of mallscape in terms of several contradictory connotations which include ‘cosmopolitan’, ‘European’, ‘fantasy’, ‘contemporary’, ‘historical’, ‘local’, ‘tradition’ and ‘innovation’. If an express intention of the architects was to work creatively with ‘history’ as embodied in features of a ‘vernacular’, ‘authentic’ regional building style, another – oxymoronic – was through “the overall effect of the exterior architecture and design” to concretise ‘the fantastic’, to create, “a powerful statement that departs from the architectural language of the day to day to a bygone time of grandeur and fantasy” (Bray 1994b:16). This is

envisaged as “an aesthetic treatment and [a] spatial progression” which combines “shopping and leisure pursuits into a magical event for the consumer” (Bray 1994a:17). Slessor’s objection to a *sly* pillaging, then, completely misreads the quality of the architectural borrowing: declarative rather than deceitfully subtle. The ‘historical’ theme of The Pavilion is fantastic, fabulous history, and must be interpreted as such, without a cavilling insistence on cultural-historical inaccuracy or anachronism. Curiously, too, this invention intersects with the historical, since with the Great Exhibition commercial display and decoration increasingly became syncretic and surrealist, incorporating “all traditions and myths...for commercial purposes” and investing “artificial and material things, whole urban spaces, with plasticity and life....Commercial designers shifted the improvising power of the imagination....They strove for theatrical effects and for a new enchantment” (Leach 1989:100). Indeed, as my discussion of The Crystal Palace has indicated, it was this nascent ‘embellished reality’ to which Paxton himself had recourse in seeking to fashion what he considered to be a built structure appropriate to the modern achievements of mid-nineteenth-century England. As Paxton’s rebuilding of The Crystal Palace makes clear, this style was neither provincially nor nationally entirely ‘English’; it was a haphazard borrowing from many sources in an attempt to *dramatise* an heroic sense of national identity.

Similarly, if the architects of The Pavilion acknowledge an historical referent in The Crystal Palace, they also characterise the design of The Pavilion as involving the use of an eclectic architecture with distinctly local historical allusions (Bray 1994a). Here, ‘the Victorian’ is imagined not as forcefully imposed colonial structure, but as a meaningful “local vernacular” (Bray 1994b:15) that collates a number of historically and geographically disparate elements into what is loosely felt to be a reconstructed South African Victorianism: The Crystal Palace alongside an “architecture reminiscent of the historic roots of the Dutch East India Company and the prominent Indian community” (Bray 1994b:15). Jan Morris’s remarks are provocative here, even if not conventionally academic. She claims that the British Empire

was a muddle of motives, ideas, myths, pretensions, misconceptions and social attitudes, never unanimous in its intentions....It embodied no over-riding principle of purpose. Seen in the clearer light of retrospect, even its loftiest aspirations seem illusory and theatrical, and so hard is it to disentangle its good from its bad, its truth from its deceptions, that most of us remember it less vividly now as a political organism than as a sort of gigantic exhibition.

We have forgotten its statistics, even its extent, but we can see the theatre of it still – the flags and the scarlet uniforms, the grey ships at sea, the imperial railways speeding across their viaducts, the grave palaces of justice and the frontier fortresses, the cities of Empire sleeping in the northern night or astir in the southern sunshine, the panache of polo players, the complacency of colonial merchants, the swagger of subalterns, the proud but portly figure of the Queen-Empress herself, Alexandrina Victoria, the impresario or perhaps circus-mistress of this inconceivable performance. (1982:10-11)

This problematises easy assumptions concerning the attractiveness to some white South African consumers of the Victorian-colonial style; it hints at complex, never transparent emotional investments in a nostalgic desire for the ‘return’ to a historical moment of strong European control. The Pavilion’s skyline, with its verdigris domes and fortress-like mass, far from unilaterally attesting to an exploitative English Imperialism, bears witness to the syncretic and shifting idioms through which the English abroad have sought to imagine themselves. Morris makes this point about the architecture of the British Empire.

Picture a representative building of the British Empire, silhouetted for us against the glow of that old spectacle, and we are likely to imagine some romantic fantasy of Oriental Victorianism, part western, part eastern, bulbous dome beside pinnacled turret, standing in showy display beneath cloudless sky or swirling monsoon cloud. And we are right, for something of the sort really was the nearest the British ever got to an imperial style of architecture. They had run through the whole gamut of modes in the attempt – classical pastiche in India, Australian Georgian, the lovely Colonial architecture of Canada’s eastern seaboard, transplanted Palladian, even tropicalized Early English. This fine variety

was never destroyed: but it was overlaid, sometimes overwhelmed, and in a sense sealed by the triumphant eclecticism of the Victorian climax. (1982:92)

As my earlier comments concerning an 'Empire sensibility' might have suggested, we are not talking, here, about rigorous historical quotation, but about 'feeling', 'suggestion', 'image', 'symbol' all of which frequently involve the heightening of reason and the suspension of historical accuracy for romantic effect. This is a discursive set of images and ideas which does not balk at Romance, which frequently realigns reality with the longed-for, and brings routine probabilities into conjuncture with as-yet-unrealised possibilities. It might not be too far-fetched to suggest that the use of a Victorian-colonial theming in late-1990s South African retail architecture signifies struggles for prominence that are not historically limited to the British Empire. For instance, the imagined power accorded to Empire on account of its visibility in dramatic built scale, may lead an imperial version of Victorianism to be regarded by some as an appropriate theme for contemporary South African commercial architecture, grandiosely embodying an ambitious South African nationalism which aspires towards influence over economic-political affairs both globally and on the African subcontinent. Considered even within its immediate region of the greater Durban metropolitan area, the themed style of The Pavilion is certainly intended, in part, as a distinguishing signifier of Durban as a prominent, advanced city which 'cares' about its image and the consumer-recreational facilities which are offered to its culturally diverse residents and visitors. Of course this is redolent of discourses of cultural imperialism, but it is not necessarily incompatible with discourses of democracy and the extending of 'the good life'.

We could say, indeed, that The Pavilion resonates with the dual nature of Imperialism, placing a cultural heroics alongside a fascination for the thrill of undiscovered identities; the mode of high-seriousness and cultural conviction alongside a claim for the legitimacy of pleasure, enjoyment, adventure and spectacle. The very name 'the pavilion' is at once layered with allusion and highly elusive. It works to represent this consumer site as one that is culturally and semantically 'deep', rich, full of promise for the consumer in search of shopping and leisure facilities. 'The Pavilion' evokes a welter of historically and geographically jumbled images, which nevertheless might intersect at the level of desire: images of 'gentlemanly' sporting entertainment, old-fashioned bandstand amusements, elaborate beachfront structures built to enable public relaxation, sybaritic enjoyment of 'the exotic', garden follies, extravagant incarnations of modern national identity such as those housed in the pavilions of world fairs and exhibitions. 'The Pavilion', indeed, signifies beyond the British Imperial to intersect with Eastern design idioms such as we find in Mughal Indian palaces and in painted Persian architectural miniatures.

This, then, is history as diffusely 'recollected' past, a disaggregated 'process' collection of images and ideas gleaned from mass-mediated representations and multiple memories. Without relying on historical accuracy, the design mode of The Pavilion works emotively; it points even those with a comparatively limited architectural vocabulary in the direction of actual and fictional instances of splendour-cum-excess such as The Crystal Palace, The Lost City, The Brighton Pavilion, Disneyland, *The Far Pavilions*, The Taj Mahal...not to mention any number of filmic sets which feature heroically-proportioned and fantastically elaborated imperial architectural structures.

The Pavilion – with its announced freestyle borrowing from Paxton's Crystal Palace, as well as from a colonial-imperial vernacular that includes Mughal palaces and an 'Anglo-Hindoo' fascination – showcases history as simulacrum rather than as locus of an historically 'genuine' cultural knowledge. Perhaps it even ceases to be history, and acquires credibility in terms of a syncretically lived present and the longing for a 'better future'? My reading of The Pavilion hints

at the ways in which history, unevenly mobilised as 'romance' and as a glance towards 'the real' and the 'yet-to-be-achieved', may inform the contemporary commodity enterprise. In designing The Pavilion, the architects have preferred to emphasise the romance of history, since it is this aspect which will most widely, richly and profitably intersect with the romance of contemporary consumption. They perceived in the 'Imperial Victorian' a theme sufficiently complex to accommodate both the *historical* referent, and the expansive scope in terms of which many people envisage *contemporary* consumer culture (Bray 1994b:16). Whatever the loose historical allusions of The Pavilion's theme, I suspect that what tends to occur in the consciousness of shoppers is that 'The Pavilion' evokes not history, but itself: a mega mall; a landmark in regional consumer culture; a locus of pleasurable, if not infinite, consumption and the production of the self. The Pavilion displaces past into dramatically present manifestation. The Pavilion, it could be claimed, uses spectacular historical thematic reference to draw attention not so much to *past* historical styles, but to the supposedly unrivalled opportunities which the *present* presents for pleasurable consumption. As expressed in an advertisement: "there's a treasure trove of fun and excitement for everyone at The Pavilion. Discover an unequalled choice of shops, facilities, restaurants and movies all under one roof". In the manner of imperial exhibitions, which "sought to make the whole world, past and present, metonymically available in the assemblages of objects and peoples they brought together" (Bennett 1988:79), a mall such as The Pavilion purports to offer the consumer "A World in One Centre". Its imperial design envelope is "[s]tuffed full of objects from around the world,...a treasure trove of eclectic design, opening an Aladdin's cave of all the world's delight in extravagant profusion" (Raeburn 1984:224). This last, by the way, is gleaned not from publicity for The Pavilion. It is a writer of popular architecture describing, in appositely extravagant prose, the Great Exhibition of 1851.

The Re-Novation of the Past? The Workshop

In discussing The Pavilion I engage with a form of mall design which themes space through the loosely historical referent, and hope to have shown how even imagined histories are amenable to creative, rather than dismissive, interpretation. Now, I go on to consider whether 'the mall', habitually given by critics a negative gloss as a place of conspicuous contemporary consumption, is most likely to be positively recuperated when the site entails forms of actual historical restoration. Can design architects make consumption meaningful by meticulously seeking to restore or preserve an authentic sense of the past when redeploying the historically important building as a mall? Or is this return to the real past also to be treated with suspicion, considered as evidence of a nostalgic desire for tradition?

Let me explore questions like these by turning to the use of history in the design of The Workshop, a prominent mall in the urban centre of Durban. With its reworking of a Victorian-colonial historical idiom, The Workshop entails an obvious staging of local history. This mall is primarily explicable in terms of urban renewal: it was designed around the creative reuse of a vast turn-of-the-century building that had been destined for demolition when Durban's new train station was erected in Umgeni Road. Designed circa 1903 as "The Boiler Machine and Erecting Shop", and subsequently known as Workshop No.1, the building was a steam locomotive repair shed which was originally part of Durban's central station. The project architects sought to revitalise the disused Victorian shell, wherever possible retaining the cultural and historical authenticity of the building: its industrial-utilitarian character, its distinctive west-facing gabled front, and a south elevation that features rhythmic Romanesque arches. (See Figure 4.iii.) The verisimilitude of the project necessitated the remanufacture of sash windows and of individual bricks to match the defunct imperial brick types, as well as the salvage and restoration of signage,

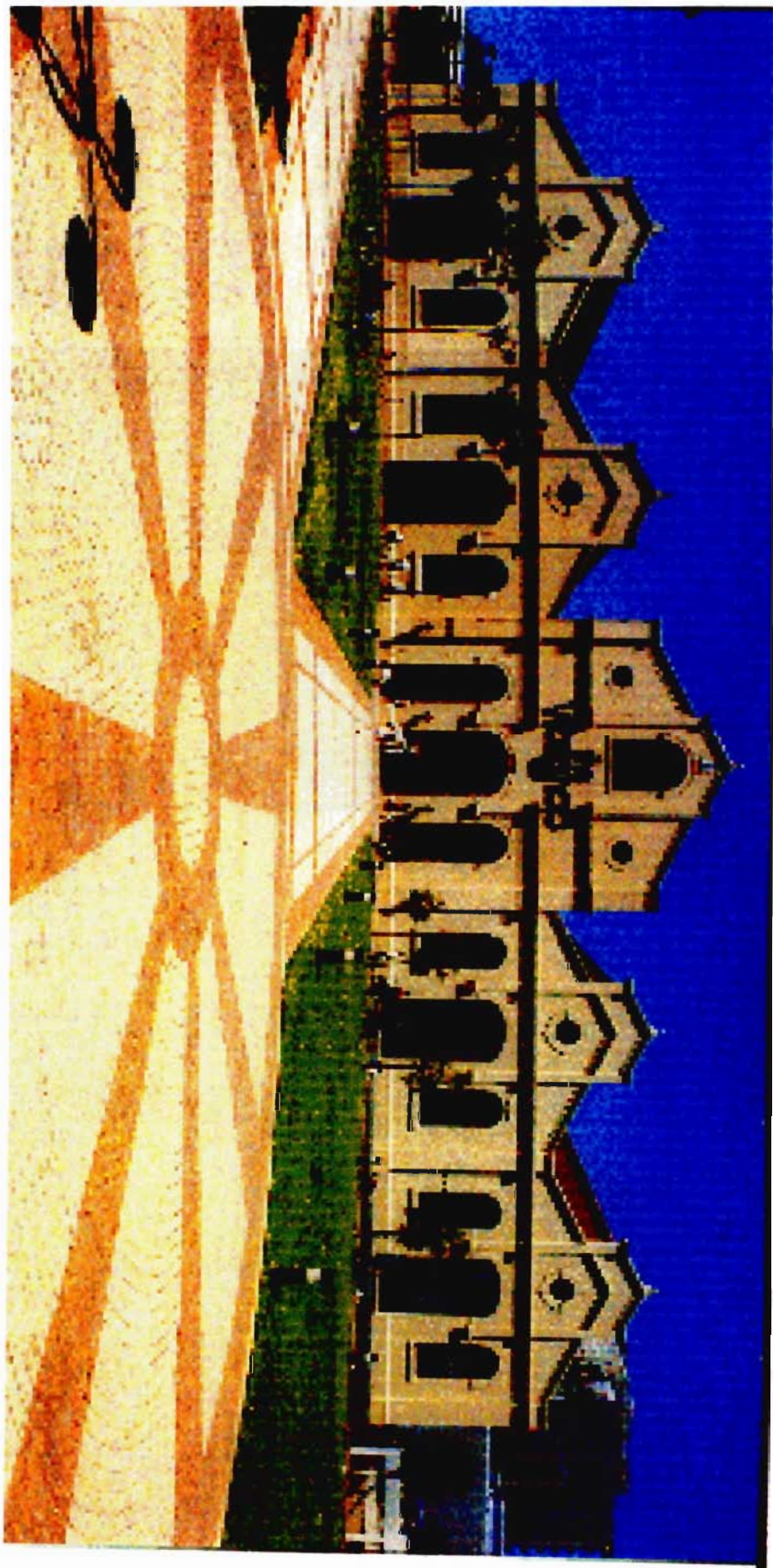


Figure 4.iii

and of cast-ironwork and steel roofing structures originally made in Bristol (*Architect & Builder* 1987). What we are dealing with here, then, is not fantastic invention, despite the creative reworking of the design team. This is a serious, and therefore meaningful engagement with the sites of a regional past. Fair enough. But we are still caught in something of a quandary, for the discussion thus far encourages the reader to evaluate The Workshop preferentially precisely because it thwarts some of the negative categories in terms of which shopping malls are often derided by critics: vulgar newness, superficiality, conspicuous consumption, inappropriate design vocabularies....Does The Workshop escape Fiske's charge of brash newness, for instance, because its history, however mediated by designers, is at least rooted in the authentic past of the site and its built structures?

I would that answers were simple. For in trying to devise a response, I cannot escape the fact that even the 'real' history mobilised in relation to the development of The Workshop could not entail 'restoration' but only *restoration*. However sophisticated one's technology – indeed, *because* of an anachronistically super-modern technology – 'restoration' is impossible. Instead, it entails the production of something new, a previously non-existent object which stands in dialectical relation to the original. (In the gnomic language of Baudrillard [1983], I may express this as a 'simulacrum'; a copy without an original.)

However, I do not intend to get caught in debates which argue for authenticity *against* commodification, especially when it seems far more useful to address the fact that the restoration of historically important buildings often has as much to do with the repositioning of a city as nationally and internationally prominent, as with a belief in the 'conservative' powers of History *per se*. The use of history as the past is closely related to the needs of an evolving historical present and a desire to realise what is often imagined as an improved future history for the city in question.

Mike Featherstone's comments offer me a way forward, although he is referring to a context which is specifically British. From the 1980s onwards, he explains, there has been a tendency for cities to deindustrialise and become centres of consumption rather than industrial production. That is to say, they become more image conscious and are literally and figuratively 'imaged' as places engaged in the production of consumption through sites of leisure, entertainment, and the mythologising of history that is heritage. Cities accrue cultural capital in terms of the sights, sites, symbols and services they are able to offer the consumer, and certain kinds of cultural capital clearly have greater economic utility than others (1991:106). The image through which a city is popularised in the imagination of its idealised public increases the chances of its attracting serious capital investment. Simultaneously, and tautologically, the very likelihood of such investment tends to speed up what Featherstone calls "reconversion strategies" (1991:107) such as the gentrification of docklands and the gazumping of inner city areas.

The publicising of a city's cultural capital is one way to deflect attention from popular perceptions of urban-metropolitan decline. These negative discourses often stem from volatility in conventional forms of manufacturing and industrial production, and require counter-balancing by forms of image production if the city's reputation is to be maintained (or created). In Durban's case, from the mid 1980s onwards, the city has experienced vicissitudes (and perceived if not actual decline) in central forms of economic production: garment, motor and harbour industries. Furthermore, the city's long-established reputation as a relaxed, popular tourist resort came under threat from Cape Town's glossier, more varied, more cosmopolitan and apparently more 'crime-free' appeal.

It is hardly surprising, then, that Durban's super-structural professional industries, such as those housed in Durban's Tourist Junction at the old central station, as well as the hotel, retail,

leisure and culture 'industries' more broadly, have intensified campaigns to produce and repeatedly reproduce a number of preferred discourses through which the city of Durban 'ought' to be read. Thus Durban has expansive beaches rather than rampant crime; or Durban is a culturally vibrant, modern, truly South African venue, rather than an unsophisticated proto-colonial backwater or a mere reflection of European consumer gloss. Indeed, much effort has been expended to reconcile the city's bifurcated signifier as popular coastal resort and sophisticated 'African' Cultural Seat, and both tradition and modernity have been put to use. It is here, I think, that a mall such as The Workshop comes into its own. For if History is an influential form of symbolic capital through which cities are actually and figuratively able to regenerate themselves, this history is also inflected through appeals to the modern. For instance, 'history' becomes part of a discursive range that "extends from traditional historic value and treasures to include newly created and simulated environments....[such as] theme parks, malls, shopping centres, museums as well as popular cultural venues which are perceived to be attractive and saleable" (Featherstone 1991:106). Noteworthy, too, are the implicit modernities of the city which conserves history: a city is situated in people's imaginations as modern, progressive and forward-looking precisely because it maintains respect for remnants of the past.⁵

In relation to The Workshop, 'history' is emplaced and displaced through at least two mutually-implicated strategies of legitimation. In part, the architectural and design reincarnators of an industrial workshop in its current life as 'The Workshop', shopping mall, invoke historical authenticity as an important aspect of the mall's appeal: the mall is attractive because of history. Yet the aura of facticity surrounding the architectural restoration and remobilisation is also intended to reinforce important aspects of Durban's history, to function as a form of symbolic exchange that places Durban as a significant city on both tourist and business maps. A few of the convoluted permutations might read something like this: history is attractive because of the mall; the mall is attractive because of history; Durban is attractive because of commerce and culture; Durban is an attraction because of commerce and culture.

The use of history in the redeployment which resulted in The Workshop thus has circuitous rather than unitary motivation and effect. By relevant professionals and the city council, The Workshop was certainly envisaged as an important contribution to the belated preservation of the mid-to-late-nineteenth-century character of Durban's civic centrum. This significance was intensified in a city which had all-too-often treated its architectural past, colonial or otherwise, to cavalier demolition, and The Workshop was given a City Council award for architectural conservation. On opening in 1986, though, other more obviously commodified discourses came into play, and The Workshop was billed as South Africa's first themed shopping facility, the theme being 'Durban's Victorian heritage'. History as *theme*, in other words, was understood to have significant appeal for consumers, and The Workshop project was influenced by the development of overseas festival markets and speciality retail enterprises like San Francisco's Pier 39 and Ghirardelli Square, Baltimore's Harbor Place, and Faneuil Hall in Boston. All of these involved the reclamation for commercial-leisure purposes of previously industrial premises, and were perceived by the developers and project managers of The Workshop to have "become national and even international showpieces – cultural and commercial magnets attracting massive traffic and retail turnover, seven days a week, all the year round" (*Building* 1986:28). Thus history was recruited in the service of an enterprise that was not simply commercial in the most obvious sense of the word, but was implicated in the marketing of a city. Through the presence of The Workshop – both structure and facility – Durban could more easily be staged as a thriving South African holiday destination and as a desirable place to live. The message was that Durban, in its present form, was an economically stable and culturally-aware city. The symbolic fact of private

capital being invested in the city's heritage might also have been thought to help stem the exodus of capital from the city to less congested, more stable sub- and peri-urban areas. In The Workshop, enterprise and heritage constituted a paradoxical mythic couplet for staging a belief in both the city's equilibrium and momentum during a period of major national and regional uncertainty. The project managers go so far as to claim that as part of Durban's vigorous urban renewal plans, The Workshop was built "despite the recession and the uncertain times" (*Building* 1986:25).

When The Workshop opened, local papers carried many instances of the ritual media displays through which shopping centres are launched, and the publicity made repeated reference to Durban's colonial history as a design signature of the venue. It also repeatedly contextualised both the location and the whole project as significant to the recovery of Durban's past. The history invoked in the advertising material for The Workshop delighted in making available to shoppers a past that had been superseded. The implication was often that this supersession had been 'unfortunate but necessary', and the advertising coupled nostalgia with reiterations of The Workshop's up-to-date shopping facilities and tenant mix being in keeping with the demands of the modern consumer. As I go on to illustrate, it is in productive tensions between lexical indices indicative of pastness and those of contemporaneity that we may find 'clues' towards the ways in which a colonial version of history is staged in The Workshop. Some advertising for The Workshop, for example, plays with the past recognised as past, as one view strategically to be positioned in relation to the counter-histories of the city. For the moment, though, let me pursue the point that it is the colonial historical signature which was the most visible in the planning and marketing of The Workshop.

Robert Hewison suggests that "one word in particular suggests an image around which other ideas of the past cluster:...heritage" (1987:31), and he argues that the term is clear in only two respects. Firstly, its popularisation among professionals such as architects and museologists is comparatively recent (the mid 1970s in Europe). Secondly, the word is without definition, even in two Acts of (British) Parliament. Nevertheless, he points out, for all its apparent recency and emptiness, 'heritage' has tended to accrue negative connotations in being appropriated by conservatives. (Hewison cites as an example "Heritage USA, a 2,300-acre inspirational theme park in Carolina, the third most popular tourist attraction in the United States after the Disneylands in Florida and California". This "is the centre of the Praise the Lord fundamentalist Christian television network" [1987:32].) The discourse of heritage is frequently used to bolster claims for a privileged past that is erroneously believed to be free from vested interests and merely indicative of 'the way we were'. Assumed to be authored by a consensual 'we', heritage is widely associated with a desire to preserve a partial sense of a past, often venerated as that which *Is*, rather than understood as that which *is made* valuable. It is associated with a nostalgia for a lost authenticity, and linked with ideologies of cultural distinction.

History, in its particularly ideological form of 'Heritage', has been central to the conception and realisation of The Workshop. The aestheticisation of History into Heritage is evident in the architecture, the theming of space, and the publicity material produced for the launch. Consider The Workshop's historical references: these are to a Victorian-colonial era of white settlement and a lifestyle in which England provided the cultural yardstick. Architecturally these values are embodied both in the restored railway architecture, and in what are more obviously simulations of the historical era: period-style shopfronts, lamp posts and benches, cobbled walkways and traders' barrows, a Food Emporium modelled after an early nineteenth-century English food hall,

filigree wrought-iron, a replica of a Victorian railway carriage, as well as railway signage that is intentionally 'retro' in its lettering and materials. (See Figure 4.iv for some idea of the interior mallscape.)

Certainly, it was The Workshop's colonial history that was publicised with a flourish in an advertisement placed five years after the centre's launch in a Durban Centennial commemorative supplement. This was at once a civic and commercial brochure, in which The Workshop was visibly harnessed to a celebration of 'Durban 100 Years'. Shoppers were invited to "STEP INTO THE PAST...to a time"

When Durban's residents came out in their finery to ride on South Africa's first train,
 When the bathing beaches had a ladies-only hour,
 And the main streets were designed so that a horse and carriage could complete a U-turn.
 The charm and splendour of this bygone era has been carefully preserved at The Workshop.
 Where visitors can wander through broad walkways under high skylight roofs amidst Victorian
 barrows, lamp posts and benches,
 Where variety, interesting nick-knacks and tasty morsels abound.
 At a place which is proud to be part of Durban's rich cultural heritage.
 (*Natal Mercury* Supplement 1992:12).

The past, here, in an advertising campaign featuring sepia-toned images and 'turn-of-the-century' styling, is marketed very partially as nostalgic colonial. This is perhaps in keeping with what remained at the time the centre's primarily white local clientele. It also intersects with the efforts of those responsible for Durban's image to present to tourists a distinctive, identifiable 'local history' premised on Durban's colonial version of 'Englishness'. (Bumper stickers sold at one shop in the mall carry the Union Jack and read 'Durban. The Last Colonial Outpost'.) Similarly, *Gateway to Natal*, a tourist publication distributed free to motorists at KwaZulu-Natal tollplazas, works to persuade potential visitors that all "the romance and charm of the period is preserved in the Victorian architecture and friendly village atmosphere of the centre" (1993:32). What we have in advertising for The Workshop, then, is the aesthetic encoding of history by means of both verbal and visual signs: the social construction of The Workshop's history invites particular people to identify with the location, to view it as part of *their* valued past, and to establish with it a mythic kinship.

In trying to untangle the meanings of history in relation to The Workshop, what we might also notice is the situation of this mall in relation to historically important civic spaces, whose very form is implicated in a cultural imaginary that is Metropolitan rather than indigenously African. History – once again in its privileged European colonial forms – is encoded in the arrangement of the environment as a public landscape: in building styles which announce their origins in another time (and often 'European' place) and which bear what is considered within the relative recency of colonial versions of South African history to be the classic nobility of true, time-worn age. (There is nowhere to be seen, here, the instant patination of The Pavilion's domes, a verdigris effect achieved through a little postmodern alchemy.) In the downtown concourse of which The Workshop is part, historical authenticity is undeniably implied in the 'look' of many of the buildings. The City Hall, Post Office and (two facades) of the old station, for instance, are declared National Monuments. Their age and style signify their importance as repositories of historical value. A particular version of Durban's history, here, is conveyed through the visibility of monumental public buildings and the visibility of monuments to Queen Victoria, to the colonial 'founding-father' figure of one-time ivory trader Lt Francis Farewell, and a 1926 Cenotaph to those (white males) killed in the World Wars. If we read between the lines, then, colonial versions of history are implicit in the very geography: the arrangement of civic-related structures around a 'central place' of a square which is at once parklike and monumental, adjacent to City Hall, Library, Art Gallery, Museum. Reading further, we might remark that the artefactual



Figure 4.iv

displays of the museum and the gallery (tied as they are to the heroic collecting and collating projects of Empire), the form of accumulated cultural capital of the library, the magisterial theatre of the city hall – all of these institutions are themselves implicated in what has been recognised as a will to colonise and systematise knowledge of the Other, while inventing symbolic identities of the colonising Self.

Despite an imagined tourist appeal, this is a burdensome history for The Workshop to carry. The civic concourse to which The Workshop is proximate inscribes, both spatially and temporally, a metropolitan form of civilised governance and egalitarian individualism, with an idealised tradition of participatory citizenship and paternalistic stewardship. The historical burden is made even heavier, too, if we admit the paradoxes of the European cultural-political discourses through which Durban has been shaped. It is well-documented, for instance, that the so-called public spaces which made up South African colonial cities such as Durban were not, despite ideals of individualism, accessible to all. Or, to put this a little differently, not all South Africans were imagined to comprise a public, and actual and figurative boundaries were set in place so as to secure for the exclusive use of white people what might otherwise have been more representatively-accessible amenities. I cannot completely separate The Workshop from such ideologically-loaded and historically-specific constructions of ‘the public’. Nor can I disavow the symbolic and sentimentalised version of history as Heritage that has moved many of Durban’s white inhabitants to identify with the city’s colonial past.

Yet to grant such acknowledgements need not be to demand a dismissal of the potential of place-form. The Workshop is vectored into a past, but it is also made to mean as part of Durban’s present. As I see it, History in the form of Heritage is neither entropic nor ideologically immutable. It is perversely able to be both de- and re-historicised. As much is allowed even by Hewison, despite his generally negative depiction of heritage as a vested version of history. His book, entitled *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline*, is intended as a warning to all those institutions – “from the universities to the Arts Councils” (1987:9) – intent on eagerly manufacturing heritage as a commodity. But he does concede that historical nostalgia “can have an integrative effect by helping us to adjust to change” (1987:11). John Corner and Sylvia Harvey, similarly, observe that ‘heritage’ linked to ‘enterprise’ frequently forms a nodal couplet in processes of cultural transition, facilitating “new ways of relating imaginatively to *continuity*, whilst admitting new principles of economic and cultural *change*” (1991b:45–46). In other words

heritage and enterprise form together a key mythic couplet for preserving... equilibrium and momentum during a period of major national reorientation. To see them as self-evidently in opposition on account of the different directions – backwards and forwards – of their visionary discourse, is to underestimate the powerful articulation of past, present and future in them both. (1991b:46)

Even in H/heritage, then, lies scope for a humane and heterogeneous human presence. In the case of The Workshop, for instance, claims about the centre’s distinctiveness being premised on its relationship to nostalgic history work alongside claims about the centre’s cultural representativeness. On the one hand The Workshop is reputedly a “romantic setting from yesteryear” (*Natal Mercury* Supplement 1992:15), but on the other this mall’s originality is also perceived to reside in the fact that it “enhances Durban’s rich cultural heritage” (*Natal Mercury* Supplement 1992:15). In prominent advertisements for the centre, it is imagined that this is “More than just another shopping centre” both on account of its preserving a colonial vestige of Durban’s past *and* because it encapsulates cultural-historical heterogeneity. No doubt the latter claim is not devoid of vested commercial interest, but it does register an awareness that ‘Durban’ is not an uncontested entity, and recognises the need to justify a present calling back of ‘the’ past in relation to past and present imperfections.⁶

The very name 'The Workshop' may be deconstructed as a site of ideological labour which attests not merely to a foregrounded colonial history but to the making of history as and in the present. Considered casually, The Workshop shopping mall might be thought to have had a *naturalised*, ready-made place name in its historical origins as 'Workshop No.1'. For the most part, the name 'The Workshop', like the locality, did not require invention. In the manner of the mall's general structural authenticity, the name was derived from the historical referent. Yet this derivation, too, comprises what Morris calls "the process of territorialization" that is "the fabrication of a place-name" (1993b:313). For if the advertising to which I have already referred is anything to go by, even the historically-affiliated nomenclature and associated identity had to be strategically 're-claimed' when the mall was being popularised to a particular, mainly white South African audience, in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The history of which 'The Workshop' was part was not necessarily current, not necessarily in popular circulation. Thus however convincing the case I might already have made for the persuasive appeal of 'heritage' in relation to The Workshop, for instance, the advertising for this new shopping location had to fulfil an educative function. It had to give currency to the version of history that it seemed to invoke, as no secure assumptions could be made concerning the familiarity of even the mall's proposed primary audience with the history of the site. White Durbanites in many cases would have had a deficient sense of 'their' city's ancestry: their understanding would have been 'partial' not so much in terms of ideologically vested interest, as in erratic, and incomplete personal knowledges. Before the distinctive image of The Workshop shopping centre could be claimed through discourses of historical authenticity and life-like mimicry, the publicity agents responsible for staging its popularisation had to teach potential visitors about the history of old Durban through substantial press release material. The lower-case, industrial history of the site as 'workshop' had to be made familiar before the designed retail appeal of The Workshop could be realised. It should not be simply assumed, therefore, that 'heritage' is a depthless or easily unpicked concept. In fact, despite its indebtedness to 'heritage', The Workshop has become a site in which work and shopping, business and pleasure, history and modernity, are permeable rather than fixed boundaries. The mall and its surroundings are increasingly patronised by a far more democratically-constituted crowd than either the late-1980s national or regional contexts allowed the developers to imagine. It is a happy coincidence, too, that 'workshop' is an expression frequently heard in democratic political procedure, conveying the importance of process in determining meaning, and the value of collective contribution to product.

The present character of The Workshop is worth exploring for a while, since the changing racial-cultural composition of Durban's city centre has had consequences for the mall's Victorian-colonial identity. Despite the continuing importance of local history for the City of Durban, the Victorian-colonial has dissipated; this is being worked and shopped into something more appropriate to a late-1990s South African identity. Even the local history museum, interestingly, is reorganising its collection and display of period costumes, in which prominence was previously granted to forms of European colonial dress. Now, saris and dhotis, skins and karosses will be exhibited alongside more conventional western styles, and efforts are to be made to acquire examples of contemporary fashion styles. Curators have realised the appeal, to both tourists and locals, of history as *varied* past, as well as history as an emergent and often hybrid present.

In the case of The Workshop, no major structural or design alterations have been made: the centre stands as it did on opening in 1986. But a Victorian-colonial version of history is now seldom demonstrated in print advertising for the centre and what many might have considered the overt cultural values contained in line drawings of men in top hats astride pennyfarthings, women in hoop skirts holding hands with knickerbockered and besmoked children, have given way to

a more gestural traditionalism. A Victorian-colonial past is implied, for instance, in the regular use of 'traditional' font styles selected for advertisements. It is also latent in the centre's logo: a stylised facade of a building which refers both to the site's actual past as railway workshop, and to a conservatory-style architecture reminiscent of the great railway stations, exhibition halls, and shopping arcades of a turn-of-the-century consumer culture.

When I visit The Workshop now, the original Victorian elements and the late-1980s Victoriana are also barely visible in the tenant mix and trappings, which are of course other forms of advertising magnet for a mall. The rather twee broekie lace shops and pharmacy assistants in mob caps and pinafores have gone; the so-called Victorian barrows sell wares similar to those stacked on pallets and trestle tables on the city centre sidewalks, and the period lamp posts disappear in the eclectic retail drama. Such changes may be attributed not merely to the mall's having lost, over the period of twelve years, the aura of the original. Nor need the changes be interpreted as The Workshop's having *lost* its historic or even historically themed character. Instead, I am inclined to argue that emphases on a reconstruction of the past and/or on historical accuracy-cum-verisimilitude have been superseded by people and their activities in a polysemic process which, indeed, appositely signifies "Durban's rich cultural heritage". If for some critics any space associated with consumption must by definition signify homogenisation and uniformity, The Workshop in its present form seems to me to be defined through human and cultural diversity, despite the continuing necessity for the management of people and space. In terms of tenant mix, the centre places 'ethnic' curios from all over Africa and Taiwan alongside alternative New Age gear, 'Indian' spice emporiums, a casino, a steakhouse, specialty stores, major fashion chains, a newsagent, a supermarket, 'sidewalk' eating venues, barrows,.... Visitors have easy access to both functional and fantasised forms of retail, all of which is accommodated in a small, but dual-level, transparent-roofed, and hence visually open space which heightens the sense of a 'happening diversity'. (Such a human scale is reiterated in the fact that the design concept of this mall also situates the gabled workshop of the mall proper closely in relation to a large park, pedestrian walkways, an amphitheatre, and a plaza space. All of these are synergistic with The Workshop's comparatively modest floor area of between 19 000 and 29 000 square metres.)

For some critics, no doubt, the intended/pretended diversity of The Workshop is merely a corollary of the *standardisation* that is an inevitable concomitant of the designing of mall space and the subsequent establishing of conventional mall mix. Certainly, diversity was present even in the explicitly Victorian-themed version of this mall, although it was then more obviously managed through the device of theme. As the design architects point out in their project reports, the principal Victorian-style 'railway' theme of The Workshop is further divided up into specialised sub-theme areas such as 'The Kraal', 'The Oriental', 'The Harbour', 'The Cape Dutch' and 'The British Colonial' (*Building* 1986:28). These were selected for their capacities to "reflect Durban's cultural make-up – Indian architecture, Zulu crafts, harbour and related leisure pursuits, and the Cape influence brought to Natal by the Voortrekkers" (*Building* 1986:27). 'Diversity', then, is not spontaneous but is commercially structured into the design plan of The Workshop. Far from being fortuitous, it is ideologically integral to the presentation of a Victorian-colonial idiom as the eclectic collocation of cultures displaced from their original contexts; it is intentionally part of what makes The Workshop *work* as a pleasant shopping space. Such reservations might be expressed by the critic cynical of the mall as a commodification of cultural relations. Yet the actual human diversity to which I have already referred cannot easily be dismissed. Even the deliberately contained design hybridity of The Workshop cannot absolutely control the lived variety of the centre's visitor mix. It is also worth remarking an irony,

here. The Workshop's altered clientele has allowed the centre more (im)properly to realise the claims for multiculturalism made in the initial advertising. Indeed, it could be said to have reworked any notion of an oppressively secure British-South African colonial Victorianism into something more like cultural-ideological variety and even jumble. It is this kind of unsettling and often haphazard combination, recent cultural anthropologists and historians have shown, which are as characteristic of Britain's imperial venture as any secure achievement of ideological supremacy and cultural imposition. 'Victorianism' was an invigorating and uneasy muddle; marked by an unwitting syncretism as much as by English symbolic power.

More and more, The Workshop is evolving into a recognisably 'South African' and regional shopping space which caters to the needs of the highly differentiated race, class and cultural identities of the people who live and/or work in the city centre and who pass through the city on a daily basis, or who pay a brief visit to the city as cultural tourists. (For 'hard' data, see the Durban Retail Library survey of 1996.) This change is precipitated not only through The Workshop's proximity to central fleamarkets, informal traders, and bus and taxi ranks, but also *because* of its being well-situated in relation to the historically colonial civic centrum. History (as heritage and as commerce), is being refashioned by people and present historical circumstance into forms which work and play. This may involve gestures towards the colonial Victorian, as well as to the sale of African ethnicity and Asian colour to the foreign tourists who are visiting Durban, but for many locals it also entails a cultural mix that implies the potential for difference to be lived as an unexceptional ordinary. This picture of the contemporary Workshop is a version of Karon's idealised Greenmarket Square, no doubt, but it is one far more open to the constantly in motion human potential of any place-form; the mall as precisely a vector of the vibrant street, rather than, as in Karon's analysis, the culturally sterile prison-house of consumer Capital.

Knowledge, Culture, Capital

Retail architecture's turn to history as theme and as renovation is not in itself an unusual subject. Thus in the immediately preceding section on malls in their various relations to history, I have sought to offer interesting rather than merely evident observations. In the present section of this Chapter, although I turn to particular malls and their representations for the purpose of illustration, I forgo the detailed reading of individual mall locations and attempt two forms of response to 'the mall'. Firstly, I contemplate some of the curious analogies between mall and university that seem not to have been considered by those literary-cultural critics who consider commodity culture to epitomise ideological incorporation, and intellectual culture the responsibility of critical opposition. Secondly, I theorise some of the activities and popular forms of knowledge – shopping, looking, walking – through which mall spaces may be rendered meaningful by the consumer. I use both occasions in order to search out conceptually challenging connections between my academic and consumer selves.

My research has increasingly led me to explore the unsettling possibility that 'the mall' and 'the university' are related forms of cultural knowledge. As much is embedded, however unwittingly, in a comment made by the architects of The Pavilion: despite their different architectural *idioms*, the monumental *scale* of the central dome on The Pavilion's roof "ranks in the urban landscape with familiar elements such as the University tower" – the highly visible tower of the Memorial Tower Building (Bray 1994a:18). (See Figures 4.v and 4.vi.) In the few pictorial maps I have come across since The Pavilion was built – the one charting the major landmarks of the 1996 Comrades Marathon route, for instance, and the map which is for sale at the tourist kiosk of Durban's international airport – the central dome of The Pavilion and the

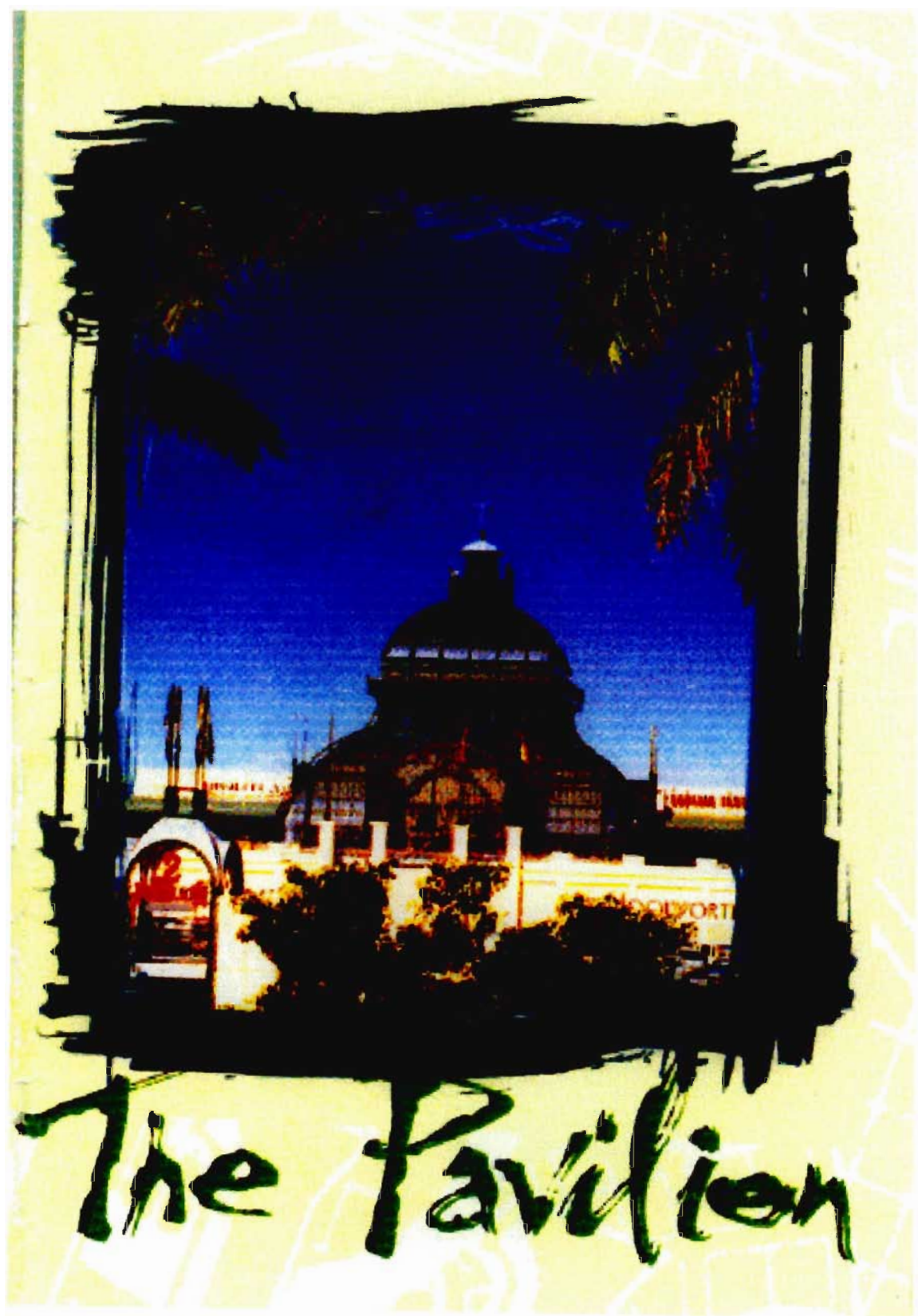


Figure 4.v

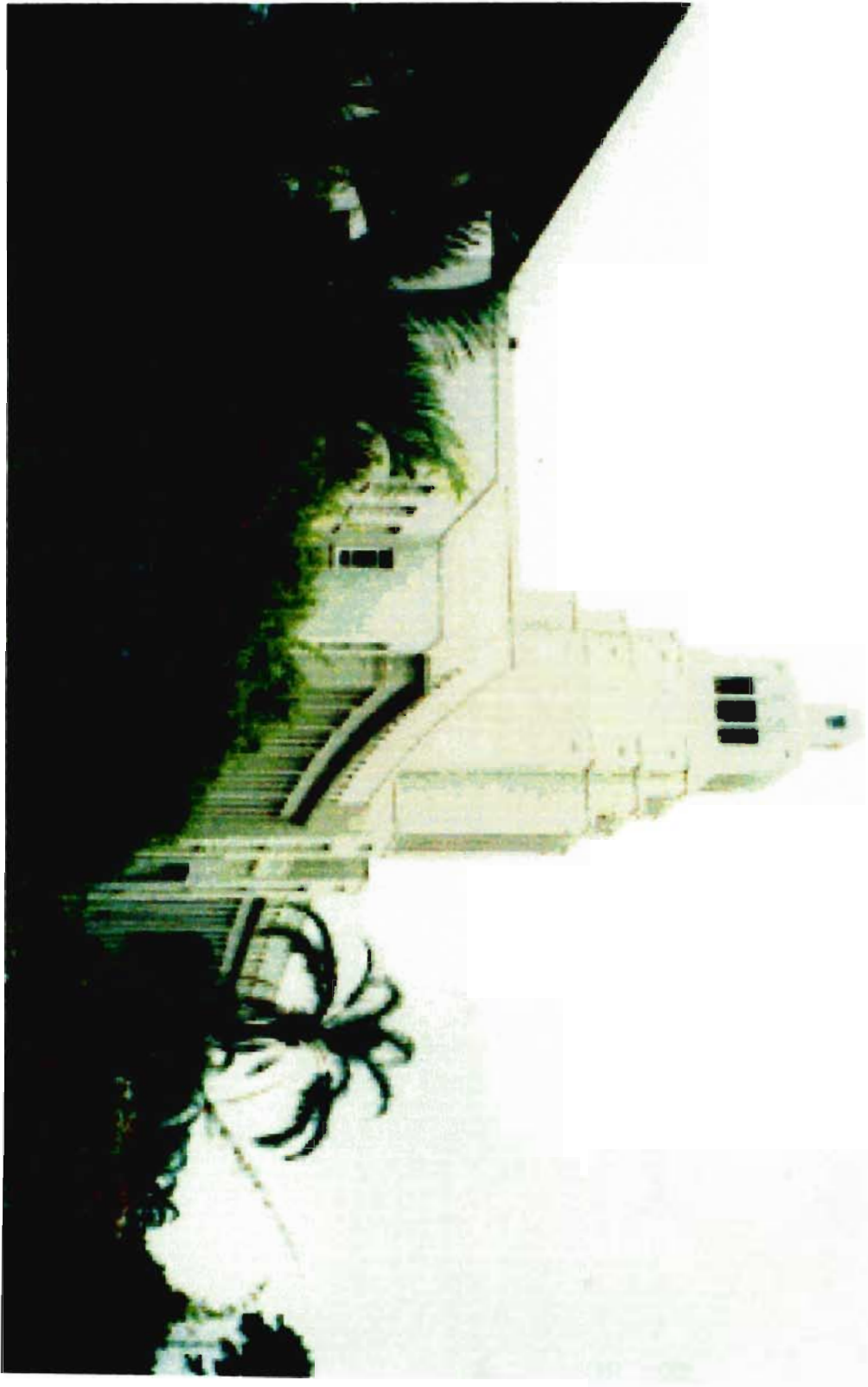


Figure 4.vi

Memorial Tower of Durban's Natal University campus are used as succinct visual references to important areas of Durban.

Although architects may argue that the largest dome is comparatively squat, leaving The Pavilion without a satisfactory vertical accent (see Figure 4.i), a range of more casual observers to whom I have spoken regard the main dome as one of the mall's most distinctive structural features. (The other is the mammoth ochre-coloured mass of the building itself.) This signature is given further flourish by the fact that the dome has been adopted as the design logo of the mall. Advertisements for the centre habitually use a portrait page orientation with an elegantly symmetrical border suggestive of cast-iron fretwork, and capped by a conservatory-style dome. This is an often-repeated and hence familiar media representation of The Pavilion. Along with photographic images that grant visual prominence to the conservatory-style glass roof, the logo works to disseminate 'The Pavilion' to a wide public. (See Figure 4.i.) The print representations are as much embodiments of 'The Pavilion' as is the built mass of The Pavilion itself.

Colloquially, then, the dome is central to the iconography and epistemology of The Pavilion, much as photographs of and references to 'the Tower' are frequently used as shorthand signifiers of the Durban campus of the University of Natal, whether in the giving of direction, in pictorial maps of Durban such as those referred to above, or simply in evoking 'the University'. (In Bray's comments 'the University' is unnamed, yet securely identified through its 'tower of learning'.) Both *the Pavilion* and *the University* are connoted by the use of distinctive architectural features as regionally pre-eminent symbols of cultural capital, despite there existing other malls and universities in the Durban area. The exceptional status of each of 'the Pavilion' and 'the University' is configured reciprocally: the one is equal to the other, by which logic we might argue that the other, then, is equal to the one. They become, in curious ways, one and the same forms of cultural institution – or, at any rate, analogous.

Bray's analogy presents the identity of Durban in terms of what we might call totemic fixations – tower/dome, university/mall, and the comparison proposes provocative parity between mall and university as valuable kinds of contemporary knowledge. By implication, the shopping mall – for most of us associated with the informal, *ordinary* social practices of shopping and leisure – could also be understood as related to *academic*, professionalised, discipline-specific knowledges, some of which feature in university-study (marketing, say, or retail management, geography, architecture, and town planning), others of which have been deemed 'inferior', applied, technikon-specific subjects (window dressing, styling, public relations, fashion design).

Consider, here, the rise of 'mall science', in which detailed audiovisual and other trackings of shoppers' habits are made, with the intention of enabling retailers to produce a more systematic sense (a better oxymoron one could not hope to find) of their desired market. Increasingly, the university turns to similar strategies of the audiovisual commodification of self-representation in order to generate for a desirable student body a preferred image of campus life. Recognise, too, that as is the case with academic fields, 'the mall' is the subject of professional disciplinary projection. During August 1992, for instance, Marketplace Africa and the South African Council of Shopping Centres hosted the '1st African Congress of Shopping Centres' at Sun City, a gathering which was intended both to generate and to systematise knowledge of malls, their management and their publics. The South African Property Owner's Association (SAPOA) held the '3rd African Congress of Shopping Centres' during October 1996, in particular seeking to publicise the event by demonstrating the relevance of key sessions to mall-related professionals and, by extension, the pertinence of 'the mall' as a meaningful genre in the South African context. Sessions included "global comparisons and contrasts; mall design within an African context; the role of Black businessmen [*sic*] in retail; marketing and maintaining vitality in African cities and

their shopping centres” (*Building* 1996:15). (Notice, here, that the areas of interest – local/global; comparisons/contrasts – are not dissimilar from those that presently engage intellectual debate within university disciplines. In trying to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant forms of knowledge, then, the criterion cannot simply be that those who seek to professionalise the study of commodity culture are inherently expedient or compromised.) Especially in the case of ‘mall science’ as a nascent discipline, such conferences as those mentioned above would have been designed to achieve more than merely the rapid circulation of investment and marketing information on the topic of ‘malls’. In all probability, they also functioned as a symbolic means of conferring esteem and status on the area of study, and on those involved in it. As we already know from academic corridors of power, ‘the conference’ and ‘the journal’ (which are cathected into correspondent mechanisms governing funding, acceptance, and publication) are among the crucial apparatuses mobilised to secure and manage disciplinary respectability. Indeed, the youthful South African mall profession would have been borrowing from international convention: the American mall pioneers DeBartolo Rouse Hahn Bohannon and Taubman, for instance, have established their own institutions such as the International Council of Shopping Centers, as well as trade journals such as *Shopping Center World* and *National Mall Monitor* (Crawford 1992; Kowinski 1992.) In South Africa, journals like *Shopping Centre Profile*, *Retail*, *Marketing Mix* and *Building* fulfil a similar function, and are available to those in the trade, to technicians which offer diplomas in familiar fields such as marketing, and in the yet-youthful area of mall management, and to universities intent on producing professional practitioners in disciplines such as architecture.

Although I can only be perfunctory here, the discursive intellectualisation and professionalisation which are put to work in constructing the mall as a ‘discipline’ could remind us that the mall and the university as cultural institutions intersect more often than conventional knowledge divisions make visible. If academic strategy has all-too-often been to privilege its own difficult, specialist, intellectual authority over the supposedly easy repertoires of a mass quotidian, both mall and university are in various ways commoditised forms which in turn commoditise a number of knowledges. (My own academic reading of malls is an awkward case in point.) Even if I am reluctant fully to subsume the role of the university within the institution of the market, it is without doubt the case that in present-day South Africa, the university is under increasing pressure to make its various knowledges appealing to a broader range of primary and secondary consumers, whether parents, funders, students or employers. Knowledge is being widely represented as interesting discovery and saleable cultural capital; disciplines like ‘English’ are being redesigned with an eye to their marketability as ‘Media and Communication’ or ‘Writing for the Professions’; courses are being repackaged to enable students to ‘shop in’ for only those specific segments of a ‘programme’ which are appealing, and/or which have instrumental, vocational use-value. Advertising strategies (such as those quoted in the second section of this Chapter on history), which repeatedly represent the mall as site of pleasurable discoveries about the contemporary self, are increasingly put to use in the publicising of the university as a valid form of contemporary learning. This is most evident in traditional Humanities subjects, which have tended previously to preserve for themselves a ‘pure’ rather than an applied intellectual purpose not tied to the taint of commodification. (Although I cannot chart their history here, such vested cultural differences seem to derive from the discourses associated with Romanticism. There is no inherent division between aesthetic and utilitarian forms of cultural pursuit, or between spirit and flesh, mind and body. In the eighteenth century, however, in an attempt to dissociate itself from the supposedly vulgar, tasteless practices of a lower class and to effect an affiliation with a symbolically more valuable, prestigious, aristocratic cultural capital, the rising

middle class fraction in England and Europe appears to have mobilised a rhetoric of sociocultural distinction.)

In seeking to read 'the mall' in ways more complex than dismissal, we are likely to come up against volatile challenges to academe's regulations concerning the nature of worthwhile cultural knowledge. As Featherstone explains in a chapter that deals with the reconstituting of the aesthetic under the impetus of postmodernity: in attempting to read a window display in a department store, we would have

to ask the question 'Who arranged the display?' The answer would be window dressers, but we can also point to other related workers in fields such as advertising, marketing, design, fashion, commercial art, architecture and journalism who help to create and design the dream-worlds. In many ways their tastes, dispositions and classificatory schemes are similar to those of the artists and intellectuals, and they usually keep in touch with the latest developments in this sphere. Hence in many overt and subtle ways they also transmit aesthetic dispositions and sensibilities, and the notions of 'the artist as hero' and the importance of the 'stylization [of] life' to wider publics....In effect, as cultural intermediaries they have an important role in educating the public into new styles and tastes. (1991:77)

In other words, the mall entails a concatenation of alliances and convergences that are unsettling to the university's traditional figuration as arbiter of cultural capital. This occurs not only in relation to the *intended* yet perhaps *unrealised* "sets of experiences...generated by advertisers, designers, architects and other cultural intermediaries", but also through the *conscious co-operations* effected

between proprietors, patrons, trustees and financiers....For example, a New York department store promoted a China Week in which art works and museum treasures were exhibited in the store. The Metropolitan Opera in New York hosts fashion shows....Japanese department stores regularly display art treasures and hold exhibitions of paintings. Such promotion phases and exhibitions blur the distinctions between high culture and low culture and the distinctions between commerce and culture. (Featherstone 1991:104)

Of course differential evaluations of the mall and the university as forms of knowledge should continue to be made, but as I have sought to indicate in the preceding discussion, these are more properly to be understood as strategic or tactical, than as immanent and absolute 'ethical' or 'moral' distinctions. In agreeing, conceptually, to situate the dome of the mall alongside the tower of the university, for instance, the academic places her/himself in an unstable imaginative-intellectual zone where disdain and desire are awkwardly designated; where s/he must manage the mixing of codes across a complex constitutional circuitry and the deconstruction of symbolic hierarchies even while admitting an understandable interest in the maintaining of at least some manner of symbolic cultural distinction.

I have toyed with possible conceptual intersections between mall and university, pointing, for instance, to the attempts by mall-related professionals to mimic the disciplinary conventions of academia so as to bolster the stature of their 'discipline'. Similarly, I have suggested that the use of mall-related marketing strategies by the university somewhat gives the lie to traditional hierarchies of academic taste in which the intellectual profile of the university is assumed to elevate it above the banality of the everyday. Yet my discussion cannot but have revealed the likelihood that whatever their loose similarities, the forms of commercialised and aestheticised knowledge associated with the mall have the potential not to reinforce a conventional trope of 'the university' as 'tower of learning', but to morph this into the less comforting metaphor of an 'ivory tower' which, despite shifts in course design and image, remains aloofly remote from the haphazard and indeed sometimes unexceptional cultural repertoires in terms of which people stage their daily plays of identity.

For the mall is popularly experienced *not* as 'science' or 'discipline' or even 'analysis', but as a space made material through diffuse, naturalised practices and uses. The mall, for many, is

a site of familiar, informal knowledge. Considered in terms of traditional print media, the form that most closely (re)produces the mall in popular imaginations is not the 'journal' as conventionally understood in intellectual life, but the consumer magazine. As both Chapters 1 and 2 of this Thesis have illustrated, consumer magazines function as an almost encyclopedic resource of commodified abundance, regularly showcasing and recycling the 'changing variety' of consumer products through which contemporary subjectivity is imagined, and they also familiarise their readers with the preferred forms of cultural knowledge and behaviour of a particular sociohistorical moment. This knowledge is often treated as everyday, even when aspects of specialisation are involved, as in the case of the women's magazine, and it is at once fleeting and returning. For Morse, indeed, the mall is implicated in an ontology which, being the very conceptual "haunt for creatures of habit" (1990:196) is beyond figuration through tropes of either resistance or performance. As she explains, practices

that can be performed semiautomatically in a distracted state – such as driving, shopping, or television watching – are the barely acknowledged ground of everyday experience. This ground is without locus, a partially derealized realm from which a new quotidian fiction emerges. (1990:196)

The dispersed realm of the mall exists in regular magazine pages that are given over to consumer advice and product display; it exists in daily television slots for tele-shopping; it exists in the virtual world of the internet, which some journalists characterise as "The new way to shop" (Manoim and Oeschger 1997:4) on "South Africa's Online Malls" (Young 1997:4). Yet I suspect that while academics might be able to bring themselves to grant the implications for cultural capital of 'professional', 'disciplinary' intersections between the mall and the university, they would be far less likely to give sympathetic understanding or even interest to this disaggregated "quotidian fiction" of malling.

Let me consider the case of shopping, one of the primary activities said to occur within the mall. While not habitually recognised in university disciplines as a meaningful cultural practice, shopping is an important form of social knowledge in that it intersects with the lives of many. For most people, shopping and related activities are not specialised intellectual concepts requiring formal study, but processes more real, more enunciative of 'the world' than what are frequently believed to be the solipsistic, out-of-touch pursuits of intellectuals. This should lead the researcher to expect that despite the expedient managements of mall space by Capital, shopping in a mall will not be susceptible to any single critical understanding. Shopping may be utilitarian and/or diversionary, experienced as an odd intersection of duress and pleasure, variously unconscious and foregrounded in consciousness. We sometimes shop or windowshop 'until we drop', just for the enjoyment, even within the paradoxical knowledge that we are playing out the alienating, even deathly injunctions of a bumper sticker. (The fact is that in most ordinary circumstances we do not, literally, shop until we drop dead from exhaustion, destroyed by the physical havoc wrought upon our bodies by a debilitating consumerism. Nor, in most circumstances, while shopping may be fatiguing, do we even figuratively 'drop', finding ourselves psychically disabled by the plethora of information, choices and human proximities which are often a feature of mall space.) Further, we are sufficiently astute to understand that 'shopping' may be not only (or even) a financial transaction, but a metaphoric or performative projection in which unfulfilled longing and dullness are temporarily exchanged for something other. Ideologically the 'we' in both of the sentences immediately above is a sitting duck, a rhetorical construct just waiting to be sniped at. But it remains true that there are various kinds of shoppers with various needs, impulses, and wishes, which are invoked and sometimes realised in various kinds of 'shoppings'. And for many urbanites, despite the discrepancies of income which mark South African life, the scene of these diverse exchanges is much less frequently the corner tearoom or even the spaza shop than it is the

anchor chainstore, the coffee-shop, the fastfood outlet, the movie house, or the speciality venue, of some sort of mall: the 'communities' in which South Africans shape their identities are not in any simple ways those of 'racial solidarity' or oppositional politics or even 'fraternity'.

While I am so closely on the subject of shopping as one of the primary activities said to occur in malls, let me address the issue of shopping and women. I'll risk suggesting, here, that the denigration of shopping (especially mall shopping) and 'the mall' has more than a little to do with the activity and the place having been designated a female, and hence an inconsequential form of knowledge. Indeed, as is implied in the Guassardo (1979) essay from which I quote near the beginning of this Chapter, it is in particular middle class women who have been at the receiving end of criticism for what is construed as their selfish and deluding capacity to shop while the real world drops.

For Rachel Bowlby, any claims about the apparent naturalness of the connection between shopping and femaleness are in fact contingent.⁷ She argues that she must necessarily "start from the proposition that 'women shop' is a problem as much as a premise" (1987:185). As she explains, in using the formulation "women shop" she intentionally duplicates another ostensibly obvious statement about women, "women mother", and she borrows from Nancy Chodorow's (1978) inquiry in which the slide between naturalness and social construction in motherhood is subjected to scrutiny.

I cannot deal with this issue comprehensively, but it does need saying that shopping, along with romantic love, has habitually been defined as at once a capricious and an enduringly female mode of understanding. (Women have themselves tended to figure tautologically in many cultural lexicons.) Shopping and romantic love are generally regarded as practices and bodies of knowledge in which women excel and men are deficient. Note that 'deficiency', here, is positively rather than negatively located, so that the so-called knowledge which women seem to possess is in fact cast into dispute as false consciousness, while an ostensible male lack is 'really' a superior cultural understanding. Within the contradictory discourses that construct consumption, the implication is that men cannot be expected to pay attention to intrinsically valueless or at best marginal cultural practices. The deep structure of patriarchal capitalism envisages earning as masculine and spending as feminine. (Or, to put this slightly differently: production as male, and consumption – construed as merely another form of women's inferior reproductive function – as female.) Women are imagined as the domestic managers of both the economic and the emotional resources of the nuclear family, as *husbanders*. It is not surprising, then, that women have most frequently been addressed as consumers rather than producers, or that this emphasis on consumption continues to appear in relation to women's increasingly independent spending power. Furthermore, within a cultural frame which despises consumption, it is hardly surprising that 'woman' has often functioned as the object to be figuratively consumed, as well as the subject of consuming passions that encompass sexuality and the infinite desires of commodity consumption. These characteristic, if forced elisions of consumption and production in relation to femaleness are hinted at in the oxymoronic, punning headline of a 'piece' from the commercial property pages: "Centres Spread" (*Daily News Journalist* 1995:20). The phrasing gestures not only towards the proliferation of shopping centres, but to the sexualised tropes of visceral, bodily pleasures alongside vicarious psychic 'desire' through which consumption is familiarly figured. The journalist seems unable to resist even the will to make the pun. Read diagnostically, the headline signifies the ambiguous role of women within the nexus of activities and experiential modes associated with consumption: at once the primary consumer, and the object to be visually consumed. Ephemeral journalism aside, Morris (1993b) maintains that this figure of feminised consumption is the tropic dominant in even academically respectable cultural criticism, where

male critics repeatedly embody the appeal of consumer culture through metaphors of illicit seduction and tantalisingly unfulfilled desire. Unlike Morris, though, I am not sure that this need be a gendered discourse which denies female agency, reducing woman to the passively exotic houri reclining on the velvet cushion. Can we say definitively whether the allure of an object is imaginatively 'embodied' by a particular consumer as 'female' or 'male'? Can we determine whether the apparent conventionalism of the trajectory 'male gazer/female object' is what a particular male theorist has in mind when theorising consumption? Nevertheless, there is something attractive (if I may be allowed the term) in Morris's impatience. As she goads provocatively: never mind specious gender-based metaphors, isn't it plain daft to imagine that all commodities exude an auratic (erotic) allure? The rubber slip-slop? Prestick? Sunlight dishwashing liquid? The wad of cottonwool?

Whatever my differences with Morris, her wry response to figures of feminised consumption in relation to shopping and malling enable me as researcher to concede a point which consumers themselves have long assumed. That is, that *consumption* also entails the production of meaning and identity, both for the self, and in relation to group and community. Let me pursue this in relation to women, even though I must grossly oversimplify a number of nuanced theories on account of spatial constraints.

Shopping apparently situates the female shopper firmly within the circumscriptions of Capital as domestic consumers, yet as Fiske argues, it may (and I deliberately use the subjunctive rather than the more conclusive, authoritative mode) "offer opportunities to break free not just from these meanings, but from the structure of binary oppositions that produces them" (Fiske 1989:24). Here, it is interesting to return to Bowlby's discussion of women and the late-nineteenth-century European department store. She suggests that locations such as Paris's Bon Marché allowed 'the bourgeois lady' safe and legitimate access to a public space without the company of a man, allowed her to transgress private bounds by stepping visibly and habitually into those realms of the economic that polite French culture previously denied her (1987). Or consider this comment from a woman visitor to Wanamaker's department store in Philadelphia in the early years of this century: "I spent all day before yesterday in 'the Store'", she wrote to a friend; "no, I cannot call it that; for, except for the basement the commercial atmosphere is not uppermost....It is a place of joyful inspiration" (Quoted in Leach 1989:125). The department store becomes a feasible historical precedent for the role of mall space in relation to contemporary femaleness. Ferrier argues in an unpublished conference paper of 1987, for instance, that modern malls permit women – even if only some women, and even if only erratically – to refashion the gendered binaries of public and private, work and leisure. Women may find in contemporary shopping malls

a sense of empowerment from their competency in shopping operations, their familiarity with the terrain and what they can get out of it. The space is designed to facilitate their shopping practices, and in our built environment there are few places designed for women. The shoppingtown offers public conveniences,...toilets, entertainment, free samples, competitions. (no date: 22-23)

For women, the mall may constitute "an extension of the consumer's domestic space, and at the same time a totally separate 'new world'" (Ferrier no date:23). Thus even the much maligned habitus of the middle class woman – usually represented as blotted by banality, solipsism, actual and/or projected conspicuous consumption – cannot be homogenised to exclude the possibility of ambiguous boundaries. In relation to dullness, duty, and domestic routine – all of which may materialise as a spectacularly ordinary life in which hyperbolic demands are made on women's supposedly infinite time – the mall may allow women to fashion spaces for fantasy, for inversion, for affirmation, for pleasure. (Women's pleasure, of course, is a notoriously tricky notion, and

early theorists of consumer culture expressed anxieties about the ability of women to resist the allure of the commodity. Released into the consumer paradise from the respectable restraints of a private, domestic sphere – from the surveillance of patriarchal authority, in other words – would women not resort to kleptomania? Would they not be overcome by a hysteria that led them to betray their ‘better’ selves? Eve in the pre-modern garden never had it so tough.)

Once again, in trying to theorise the possible meanings of mall space for women, I am given to borrow from Bowlby’s research into ‘modes of modern shopping’. This is also the appropriate point, I think, at which to admit that by quoting her in the context of this Chapter, I am significantly displacing the emphases of her article. One of the conclusions she reaches, for instance, is that Mallarmé’s agency in his writing of the fashion journal *La Dernière Mode* was unusually different from attempts in most popular cultural texts and locations of the day to inscribe French femaleness into proper, ladylike femininity. Of Mallarmé’s magazine for women Bowlby observes that in

contrast to other fashion magazines, such as the *Bon Marché* agendas, in which the polarities of frivolous/serious, or sublime/childish are juxtaposed but never interrogated, Mallarmé’s text would thus permit a kind of double vision or double reading. Further, the implications of these pairings for representations of masculinity and femininity turns out to be destabilized.... Mallarmé’s interweaving and unweaving of sublime and infantile, masculine and feminine modes, seriously and frivolously divulges the process by which the image of a natural woman, in which women learn to recognize themselves, is sewn up into the apparently seamless text of a world in which women shop. (1987:202)

Certainly, Bowlby’s historicised discussion of the instability of the conventional oppositions that have been used to associate femaleness with shopping is valuable. But she fails to take her ideas to at least two of their reasonable conclusions: (i) the large-scale consumer culture which was nascent in the period of which she writes was from the outset characterised by incongruities that were not necessarily experienced as alienation or even as contradiction; ‘doubling’, therefore, is less apposite a term than ‘multiplying’ and (ii) consumers of all kinds have always been able to manipulate ostensible contradiction to their immediate advantage and purpose. Unlike Bowlby, then, I am not given to reserve for the high cultural figure of the rhetorically cross-dressing Author-Authority of Mallarmé the sole capacity to rework the gendered binaries of language and social conduct to his own critical intention. So-called ordinary women – in the context of which Bowlby writes these would be French middle class women in department stores, on public transport, women abroad in café society, but also, as I am suggesting, perhaps women of many sorts in many ages – might possess similar discursive agency, however ‘veiled’ from the researcher’s immediate scrutiny. Here again, in searching out instances in which shopping features ambiguously in the spaces of masculinity and femininity, authority and subjectivity, I am constructing ‘the mall’ as a place-form which may be creatively energised into meaningful space by human action. Bowlby herself remarks, for instance, that in relation to women’s agency “‘To go shopping’ or ‘To do the shopping’” are paradoxical constructions. Is ‘shopping’ “an open-ended leisure activity or a finite, specifiable task? Is it fun or is it functional? If it is true that ‘a woman’s work is never done’, shopping might indeed turn out to straddle both these categories, or to fit neither” (1987:185). Similarly, I am able to use in my own context her suggestion that shopping, “while in one way regarded as an indispensable task, is also regarded as a field for the exercise of self-indulgent pleasures which are nonetheless taken to be ‘feminine’” (1987:186-187). To allow women this ambiguous use of actual and rhetorical ‘mall space’ is not to deny that they are curiously positioned in consumer culture. It is, though, to take on the confusing ways in which ‘woman’ is mobilised as a discursive category and, instead of automatically locating the mall as a site of foolish female pursuit or, indeed, of making women’s ambiguous cultural positioning the immobilised target audience of various forms of tyrannical commercial or

ideological discourse, to identify micro-spatialities and transient moments in which women's diverse negotiations of and habituated responses to consumer culture can be theorised. (As in the case of women's uses of women's magazines, it might even be to ask that cultural critics begin to reconceptualise as imaginatively consequential that which has generally been peripheralised as trivial, dull, nondescript.)

Perhaps I need at this point to simulate the presence of 'real' women shoppers. Having already theorised a similar matter in my discussion of the readers of women's magazines, I forgo the pretence of empirical individuals or even of a putatively authentic 'everywoman', and derive my passing examples of women shoppers from a feature in the women's magazine *Thandi* (Mthethwa and Ndawonde 1996:38-41). This article, cover-lined "The Magic of Shopping Malls", contains a number of informal interviews with shoppers in which consumers, among them several women, give their opinions of some South African shopping malls. Here are a few instances.

Shopping malls have everything to offer under one roof and you don't have to walk for hours trying to find what you're looking for....In fact, being here simply makes me feel good. (Mafani Montoedi, a second-year B.Com. student, in Sandton City)

You don't have to worry about changes in the weather, especially if it rains. There are no cars with screeching tyres and smoking exhaust pipes. Instead, there's music all around which is pleasant. The man playing the piano does it for all of us to enjoy – for free. (Thuli Mthwana, in *The Workshop*)

I like the restaurants and cinemas in shopping malls....There are bookshops where you can spend time browsing through magazines or you can just sit down and look at the people. I feel I can spend the whole day looking at beautiful clothes and shoes and bumping into school mates and friends around this lovely place. One is never bored. (Thuli Msomi, in *The Workshop*)

Shopping malls cater for everybody. Whether you are rich or just an ordinary person, you can always find what you need at prices that suit your pocket. It's also a place where people meet to socialise. (Zethu Manzi, in *The Workshop*)

Of course, I cannot completely discount the fact that the writers of this feature derived their material from an afternoon spent "at two trendy malls – Sandton Square in Gauteng, and *The Workshop*, situated in the heart of Durban" (Mthethwa and Ndawonde 1996:38), or that they specifically asked "shoppers why they *liked* shopping malls" (my italics). Nor should I disregard the ways in which the publishing of such a simulated heterogeneity of voices is intended, by the publishers, editorial- and advertising-departments of *Thandi* magazine, to circulate the discourses of capitalist consumerism on which the perpetuation of *Thandi* as a women's magazine depends. And I should not imagine that the consumers' responses are somehow 'innocent', and beyond the self-interested realm of mutually-reinforcing activities and conceptual modes through which Morse (1990) maintains that the contemporary consumption of images, experiences and ideas is rendered familiar. Let's face it, many of the comments quoted above are superlative publicity material, eagerly framed (and perhaps long-formulated in the subconscious) for exactly the moment of mini-stardom that being singled out in a press feature represents for each one of us as an ordinary person. Yet these opinions do emanate from individuals, many of them women visitors to a particular mall, and they usefully remind the academic researcher of a need to take account of the fact that malling involves knowledges whose relevance (and complexity) have been obscured through cultural distinctions that have been naturalised. In its various forms, malling depends on both the mental and the bodily, boundary crossings which render it difficult to place as either cerebral or visceral, and recalcitrant to conventional disciplinary distinctions. Just being in a mall means mapping space through repeated and hence substantial inscriptions made by the body. Yet because these are erasable – or, rather, never physically present in the first place – they seem insubstantial, able to be taken-for-granted, trivialised, ignored. Being in a mall also entails the mental mapping of environment. Such diverse activities as making explicit the behavioural conventions of a mall, reading the layered, colour-coded floor plans and, over time, internalising

them without obvious intention, establishing – and then for various reasons traversing – habitual shopping and window-shopping patterns in particular malls, comparing prices and merchandise to find the ‘best value for money’, taking products on approval, and locating ablution facilities supposedly situated for convenience ‘between floors’ but in actuality rendered labyrinthine and inconvenient to almost everyone: all of these involve complicated cognitive processes, many of them taken for granted until we are confronted with an unusual, new or particularly intractable situation, which is when we find ourselves actually lost in a mall, and even unable to find the parking spot. For the researcher ‘lost’ in a multifaceted argument, where next might s/he look in trying to theorise the mall? I propose to look at looking.

More Than ‘Just Looking’

As my extensive discussion of individual malls such as The Wheel, The Pavilion and The Workshop has indicated, the architects, planners and others responsible for mall design and the subsequent management of mall space *do* attempt through their own disciplines to discipline the variety of visitors to a mall into appropriate knowledges of the consumer body. This may take both rhetorical and built form, it may rely on explicit control, as well as on more subtle conventions of constraint, a variety of architectural and semiotic barriers to filter the mall’s public. Taken quite literally, the sign systems that feature in all malls attempt to regulate human behaviour. Most malls feature the prominent display of signage which declares certain people (hawkers...) and activities (skateboarding...) to be forbidden. In view of this, Everyshopper’s phatic “Just looking” is unlikely to be an acceptable response to the assistant’s usually-polite, but sometimes suspiciously interrogative “May I help you” when the ‘shopper’ in question is in question: especially vulnerable to suspicion are not only shabbily-dressed people of whatever race, and young black men of casual attire and cocky attitude, but small groups of well-dressed black women who are often cast as shoplifters working the stores in teams.

An exceptionally explicit deterrent to so-called undesirables exists at the Musgrave Road pedestrian access to the Standard Bank Mall, in the form of a sign which reads: “No hawkers, vendors, vagrants”. This signage attempts to secure the shopping areas for a clientele ‘proper’ by barring social types who would transgress the propriety of mall commerce. We could even argue that the sign seeks to discipline and homogenise not only the notion of what properly comprises a ‘public’, but a range of production and consumption functions – hawking, vending, loitering – which are all, though in forms approved and monitored by capital, themselves crucial to the successful operation of the mall’s commercial transactions. (Increasingly, they have been admitted into the conventional mall mix in the stylised form of ‘barrow’ and ‘sidewalk sale’.)

Read more metaphorically, the ‘sign system’ of the mall as a form also works as a monitorial deterrent. As I have mentioned, shopping centres are *private* property, and this has consequences for the kinds of activities permitted on the premises, whether these are protests, for instance, or ostensibly more innocuous public activities such as market research, photography, fund raising, performances and exhibitions. Within the sign systems of ‘the mall’, by way of example, ‘demonstration’ conventionally signifies the so-called product demonstration or exhibition – the sampling by potential customers of massage cushions, computer games, non-stick cookware, eversharp knives, ‘meaty’ soya mince....Such demonstrations are an expressly sanctioned feature of mall habitats in ways never imagined for political demonstrations or union meetings. As I have indicated, the very spatial design of the environment, as dystopian critics emphasise, contributes to this sign system. Internal-facing structures, and the strategic placement of elevators, exits and central courts, for example, are practices fundamental to crowd control and the regulation of behaviour in large shopping spaces. The inward-looking gaze is a deliberate

function of what tend to be malls' windowless exteriors. While the interior mallscape is ostensibly given over to pleasurable looking and display, many malls have facades and exteriors unpunctured by the human and humane form of the window, or blanked out by means of one-way mirror-glass. Even malls with shop windows fronting onto the street, a negative analysis could argue, do not so much offer human interaction as the selfreferring transactual commerce of the commoditised and reified gaze. The Gateshead Metro, Europe's largest shopping mall, has no windows looking out over the Tyneside surroundings. But every

inch of the Centre and the surrounding car-park is monitored by cameras feeding a bank of video screens in a central security room; in addition men with binoculars patrol the roof looking out over the surrounding landscape for any sign of trouble or 'undesirables' as they term them. (Worpole 1991:141)

The probable ideological implications of such material design decisions are not difficult to discern, especially when most mall environments are now invisibly managed through elaborate audiovisual technologies: surveillance by hidden camera and 'undercover' security staff, for instance, is increasingly common. We can hardly be surprised that malls are said by their detractors to "combine the gestalt of the mausoleum with the totalitarian facade of the arsenal" (Guassardo 1979:61-62).

Restrictive signage, security guards, visually refracting mirrors, hidden cameras, a policed display of remotely auratic, often unattainable objects gleaming in the upmarket boutique personned by intimidatingly stylish young people on-the-lookout for shoplifters....Read in this way, 'the mall' is dense with visible and invisible signs to warn "off the underclass 'Other'" (Davis 1990:226). Sometimes, too, even the innocuously ordinary, peaceably browsing self may feel itself to be othered, rendered suspect and remote by a set of institutional codes that stresses the visual policing of the self. Morse even makes the perverse point that it is "the very *lack* of panoptical positions afforded within the wings and cubbyholes of the typical mall...[that is] responsible for its sense of endlessness and a sense of disorientation within it" (1990:21, my italics): you cannot see the whole structure at a glance, but must repeatedly shift yourself to different locations within the mall in a 'utopian' desire to possess a knowledge of the whole.

Yet the presence of visual technologies and the technocratisation of what might otherwise be the humanly visible cannot legitimately be recruited in the service of arguments based solely on repression. The mere existence of signage, for instance, does not express an individual's willingness to recognise him or herself in the description. I cannot, then, accurately point to a sign outside the Standard Bank Mall which 'reads' "No vagrants". In order for it to mean, the sign needs to 'be read', and some of those purportedly named in the cultural-linguistics of the sign may not be literate in English, or they may consciously elect to ignore the warning, refusing to read the implied codes. Similarly, the fact that mall development and large-scale retail lie in the hands of a few multiples does not necessarily preclude the possibility of shopping as pleasure, enjoyment, and fantasy. If 'mall mix' "is established and maintained by restrictive leases with clauses that control everything from decor to prices", it is also the case that mall "managers constantly adjust the mix, using rents and leases to adapt to the rapidly changing patterns of consumption" (Crawford 1992:9). The monolithic, then, is riven with actual and potential centrifuge. Even comparatively standardised goods for sale in locations often "designed and built by the same construction firm, fitted out to the same specifications by the same design company, and policed by the same firm of security guards" (Worpole 1991:141) are not altogether at odds with the belief that shopping, as a significant feature of the individual's wish to demonstrate style and cultural distinction, constitutes a major form of identity politics in the modern world.

Let me give a few examples of what I mean. Following several much-publicised car hijackings, car thefts and armed robberies at The Pavilion, for instance, management has

advertised improved security as an attractive, desirable feature of this particular mall. "Our new network of security surveillance cameras, strategically placed inside and outside, puts everyone on screen" (pamphlet). And "We have implemented a number of innovative and highly effective measures including regular road blocks and strategic manpower deployment and the addition of golf carts giving security personnel greater mobility and higher visibility" (*Highway Mail* 1997:7). And "If you're looking for a safer place to shop, try the internet", since to

ensure your safety and peace of mind The Pavilion now has a strategic crime prevention system and mobile surveillance security force.

That's bad news for car thieves but great news for shoppers because The Pavilion is now one of the safest commercial areas in KwaZulu Natal.

Shopping. Safe and Sound. (*Daily News* 1996:3)

In the marketing of The Pavilion as a better mall, one purportedly superior in every respect to other malls in the region, safety is publicised as a selling point that is likely to be as appealing as the regular claims for convenient access and diverse tenant mix which appear in many adverts for this regional centre. Of course, I respond to the advertisements in the context of critical-analytical enquiry with a degree of caution: it could be said, for instance, that each advertisement is phrased in an idiom which demonstrates, rather than refutes, the pervasive power structures that typically characterise mall space: strategic, network, surveillance....Each advert is replete with the 'commonsensical' terms that are often deployed to persuade a public into accepting a consensual version of 'Law and Order'. Yet these ideological difficulties cannot completely undermine the likelihood that an emphasis on security at The Pavilion is not necessarily experienced by shoppers in terms of policing, but perhaps as an invitation to take more pleasure. Security becomes a device to free mental space for relaxed pleasure and "peace of mind". (In the search for safety, moreover, management has put to highly inventive use the 'golf cart', that most stylised of upper-class leisure vehicles. As any number of commentators would probably be tempted to observe, the miniaturised form of the golf cart aptly matches the reduced – and potentially 'friendly' – scale of the mall's quasi-Disney 'Main Street', where the only vehicles allowed are safe, people-powered shopping carts.)

Nor should we disregard the fact that the advanced security of a mall like The Pavilion is sometimes overtly recast as 'play': "Shop at The Pavilion and become a movie star! At The Pavilion, everyone's on camera" (Poster and *Sunday Tribune* 1994:8). Thus the visual technologies installed primarily for security purposes are rhetorically transfigured into a version of 'mall watching', where surveillance is staged as entertaining, pleasurable effect. Here, 'security' becomes a form of control through which the problem of threats to shoppers' safety is creatively addressed. It is simultaneously acknowledged and displaced into the realm of metaphoric fun. This is in keeping with Bennett's research into the 'exhibitionary complex' (1988), and implies that if The Pavilion, as mall, is implicated in an 'exhibitionary complex' which regulates behaviour, it is this very complex which simultaneously creates space for imagining new versions of the self. Many of the visitors to The Pavilion are presumed to be sophisticated participants in a youthful (sub)culture whose members are explicitly aware of their trading in style, cool, and the visual performative. Using press advertisements and large posters which feature funky young couples whose poses designate playful self-parody, management invites the young people who make up a significant proportion of this mall's shoppers to transform the necessary practices of security into a selfconsciously specular performance. The conscious scrutiny associated with security measures is thus potentially an extension of the entertainment on offer at the mall itself: looking for things to buy, looking good, just looking, watching a movie, looking out for a bargain. Kowinski (1986 and 1992) would probably theorise this in relation to the broader Retail Drama conventionally staged in malls, where a theatrical

ambience is fostered through the design and themed dressing of the mall space itself, as well as the window displays of individual stores, the movie and video arcade facilities which are often housed in the mall, and indeed the various promotion exhibitions mounted in the mall's central court: from plays for children, to elaborate tableaux celebrating religious festivals such as Christmas, Easter and Eid, to fashion, beauty, motor and computer shows, to displays of award-winning press photographs. As William Leach discusses, this theatricality was an important aspect of the changes which occurred in commercial retail in the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century American department stores. The codes of festive and fluent spectatorship in store-window design and modern merchandising borrowed from spectacular motion picture sets, from Broadway 'shows', from scene painting, from the handbooks of museum display. And, in turn, they transformed these aesthetic modes with their own commercial energies. American department store display men consciously worked to install "a whole succession of mythical worlds" in store interiors. As Sam Wanamaker wrote of his Philadelphia retail outlet, today "this Store is an Easter Egg", tomorrow a "Garden", or a "Rainbow", or an "Autumn Festival" or an "oriental dream" (Quoted in Leach 1989:127). These were daring interior transformations

practised by merchants. Together with the show windows, the store colour and light, and the concrete display devices, they saturated commodities and commodity environments with new meanings and excitements. They created a separate space distinct from other spaces that 'transported' customers 'out of the hurley-burley world' into the projected promise of a new paradise. (Leach 1989:127)

To return to my immediate example: "Shop at The Pavilion and become a movie star!" not only stages surveillance as something about which shoppers at The Pavilion, 'thank goodness', do not have to worry. The advert actively invites young people, in particular, to perform an imaginative recasting of the policed watching associated with mall security into a commercialised aesthetic that is at once a domestication of the commodity world *and* a carnivalesque celebration that violates boundaries. Bearing in mind the numbers of young people who make up The Pavilion's youthful clientele, the ad capitalises on the potentials of 'looking' as a cultural practice which is distinguished from the kind of close watching associated with parental supervision, and is metaphorically affiliated to the illicit, sexual pleasures of collective body watching. A socially necessary security is made available for reconfiguration as a playful rebuff to restricting social convention, even as it works in the service of the elaborate visual codes that are conventional to the society of the consumer spectacle. The individual is offered an unusual opportunity to make material the metaphor of (self) display and play central to consumer culture, a viewing which, it could be argued, makes one's 'self' a defamiliarised other in the spirit of new recognitions rather than embodying the alienations supposedly enforced by Capital's fetishising of human relations. The 'movie' in question is recognised for what it is – not really a star vehicle (after all, the camera's democratic eye covers not only the singular *I*; it has *everyone* covered), but rough footage in the mode of 'the funniest home video'. It offers an extension of the paradoxically transgressive and incorporative pleasures of malling. Being in a mall, shopping, hanging out: here they become forms of theatricalised looking and complex metaphoric consumption in which audience participation is central.⁸

Many materialist critics, concerned in the face of the undeniable exclusions of commodity capitalism to maintain for themselves what I consider to be a rather unselfconscious 'moral' or 'ethical' position, have long dismissed the kinds of visual play and display that occur in malls as extreme exemplars of consumerist superficiality and narcissistic spectacle. While not disregarding such pessimism, I am more prepared to acknowledge people's deeply-felt need to affirm and validate 'self' through public display, for one of the few avenues for the producing of meaning available to people in contemporary society is the nexus of activities around the 'consumption'

of commodities. This posits consumer culture itself as a utopian space associated not with the 'death of desire', but with ever-deferred fulfilment. And as I have argued in Chapter 2 on women's magazines, given the (im)possibility of infinite purchasing in the infinite commodification upon which capitalism pivots, 'looking' becomes an important form of cultural identity, whether manifest as browsing, or as a 'look' that represents an individual's adaptations of a fashionable Look. This aspect of identity has pertinence for a critical understanding of the role of shopping malls in contemporary culture, even if not all people have similar power over looking, gazing, glancing, scrutiny.

Further, as Bennett reminds us, notions of performative spectacle in relation to self and social knowledge have been fundamental to the quirky links between an intensifying consumer culture and the responsible ideal of a civil society (1988). He refers to late-nineteenth-century world fairs and exhibitions, and the designers' preference for particular types of spatial-architectural organisation: multi-level arcades; expansive promenades and plazas; elevated domes and towers. Such structural features, many of which have since been incorporated into the design of contemporary leisure spaces such as malls, allowed people to view themselves from an unusual perspective. They were believed to make visibly available to people a new kind of knowledge about themselves as a civic and consumption collective: knowledge of 'the public' as not a mob, but as a regulated mass, an ideal citizenry. Glancing at your 'fellows' as they strolled around, looking and being looked at, prompted you into a willingness to map yourself and them, in relation to an emergent, modern, civilised body in which 'the public' became itself part of the spectacle. The idea of a well-behaved crowd enjoying *its self* helped to monitor people's individual actions and thoughts and to popularise a social vision of a consumer community pleasurably consuming the spectacle of reasonable public (Bennett 1988). If this involved the constraining forces of control and watching which the dystopian reading might in extreme forms associate with totalitarian governmentality, it nevertheless also involved pleasurable surveillance of, and instruction in, the actual and symbolic 'consumer body'. If 'just looking' has come to be the clichéd response of the casual shopper, looking also involves innovative perceptual negotiations of one's 'self' in relation to a body of other people, and it uneasily produces *and* blurs distinctions between supposedly opposed categories such as subject and object, artificial and natural, luxury and necessity, passive and active, the expression and repression of desire.

Although I cannot dwell on this, the analogue of 'looking' in a mall is walking. Here again, the pessimist might cite walking as an extension of the control exercised over public behaviour in the privatised mall enclave. If the managements of several North American mega-malls permit joggers to use the venue after trading hours, it remains the case that a person running in a mall is the exception rather than the rule. This person is likely to be imagined a bagsnatcher or other kind of criminal, since s/he is transgressing the conventional bodily codes of mall behaviour. The very mode of 'walking', rather than, say, cycling or skateboarding (both of these explicitly forbidden in most malls), becomes a crucial way of knowing or experiencing mall space: browsing, wandering, meandering, 'escalating' – these leisurely gaits both facilitate and are facilitated by the desire to look, to see the display, and deliberately to display, if one wishes, oneself. Very astutely, these have been construed by some theorists as ideological, rather than natural practices. Adorno, for one, takes issue with walking as

the bourgeois way of moving about, physical demythologization, free of the curse of hieratic pacing, of homeless wandering or breathless flight. Human dignity insisted on the right to walk, a rhythm that was not forced on the body as order and obedience. Strolling or sauntering were an amusement for the gentleman, the heritage of feudal promenading in the nineteenth century. (1986:212).

These are comments which urge us not to take for granted – to naturalise – a form of movement that the human body in many diverse public contexts seems so comfortably to call its own. But despite his anger towards walking as a privileged physical mode, Adorno's construction cannot quite disallow that walking might also represent an enabling human dignity. Taken in conjunction with the body of work which has been performed on the flaneur and the flaneuse, this could be developed to allow for the creative agency of people in sites of consumption such as the mall. Without proposing to rehearse the detailed history of the urban walker from Benjamin in his studies of Paris (1978a and 1989) to De Certeau in his chapter "Walking in the City" (1984), and beyond, let me briefly expand on this point by returning to essays by Morris (1993b) and Morse (1990). Morris, for her part, takes quite literally the idea of the pedestrian, suggesting that it is precisely pedestrian, mundane patterns of mental and bodily movement which ought to be given serious intellectual attention in the attempt to theorise people's ambivalent constructions of 'the everyday'. The importance of such a move is intensified when we grant that her primary subject is the *female* in commodity culture, and that her purpose in engaging with 'the pedestrian' is particularly to grant women forms of cultural agency that traditional (often male) critics have overlooked. Accordingly, she also invokes 'the pedestrian' at the meta-level, so as to validate her own use of an unexceptional, down-to-earth critical methodology: she purposefully talks to women about their experiences in malls, she lingers in many kinds of mall space so as to 'get a feel' of their possible meanings. She assumes the pedestrian mode in attempting to theorise the place-form of the mall 'from the ground up'.

As my previous references to her work may have implied, Morse's research (1990) is more startling in its suggestions for the importance of walking and movement, since she theorises patterns of actual and psychological motion as they relate to the "mobile subjectivity" (1990:204) of contemporary culture. Her style is the antithesis of Morris's – Morse is often irksomely cryptic and vatic in the manner of Baudrillard – but she does offer highly unusual conceptualisations of mass-mediated culture and (social) mobility. In arguing that the contemporary cultural experience represented by television, freeways and malls comprises a "proxemic logic of relations", she emphasises that media technology such as television, for instance, is not merely a "storehouse for tokens" of disparate cultural systems; it provides "passages through them". Television programming, for example,

offers many different itineraries from which to choose. The viewer as mobile subject has remote control over trajectories and channels plus power to take the off ramp and leave the zone of televisual space. However, the televisual viewer who enters a car to go shopping, or even to work, hasn't left *nonspace* behind – these realms are variations thereof. (Morse 1990:207)

For Morse, a range of actual and metaphoric-psychological movements is fundamental to the virtual worlds of late-twentieth-century existence: "strolling or speeding about in the midst of elsewhere is one of the features that constitute new, semifictitious realms of the everyday" (Morse 1990:205). Such motion, she maintains is not only paradoxical, but "relative. Safe within the halls of consumption, the body may stroll with half a mind in leisurely indirection. But the shops passed in review are themselves a kind of high-speed transport, the displacement of goods produced in mass quantities in unknown elsewheres into temporal simultaneity and spatial condensation" (Morse 1990:204). Significantly, Morse disagrees with Baudrillard's conclusion that the non/space in front of the television set (or in the mall) is inherently an "archaic envelope" where bodies lying on the couch are "simply superfluous, basically useless", "deserted and condemned" like the countryside abandoned under urbanisation. As she counters, "these couch bodies are also travelers, responding in a checked, kinetic way to the virtual experiences of motion we are offered as subjects or view in objects passing our screens" (Morse

1990:205). Thus forms like the mall, the freeway and the television comprise “the road in the middle of the idyll, reconstituting a virtual world of face-to-face relationships” (1990:205).

In this Chapter as a whole, I have been formulating a multifaceted argument for mall space and mall use as potentially more liberating than many cultural commentators have allowed. There are obviously many places that such an argument might take me, but in setting out my position on malls it brings me to a section of Fiske’s *Reading the Popular* entitled “Shopping for Pleasure: Malls, Power, and Resistance” (1989). Here Fiske attempts, by foregrounding the vigorous agency of a metaphor of ‘resistance’, to rework the trite tendency among dystopian critics to draw analogies between the mall and religion: the analogy is generally that of the shopping mall as cathedral of consumption, the most elaborate and hence most powerfully incorporating structure of Capitalism. Fiske’s casting of doubt on this habituated intellectual figure is apposite. We might admit that malls have some ‘cathedral-like’ architectural features, and that they may well bring together spectacular crowds joined in material celebration, especially of what are now often thought of as ‘pan-religious’ festivals such as Christmas and Easter. Similarly, it is true that as “early as the 1890s [North American] merchants were inscribing churches into store interiors” (Leach 1989:125), since “if ordinary Americans could not go abroad, they could nevertheless visit artificially constructed medieval cathedrals in their own backyards”: the facade of the cathedral at Rheims; a perfect replica of the rose window in the south transept of Westminster Abbey; “an incredible Cecil B. de Mille-like reproduction of the cathedral at Chartres” (Leach 1989:126). No doubt, too, the frequently ritualised practices of consumption at a deep level signify the striving after an elusive symbolic-experiential Ideal such as is embodied in the myth of Jesus Christ. But it need not follow, as is generally implied in the cathedral metaphor, that consumers, ideologically confused in their passion for the auratic authority of commodities, inevitably assume the position of worshipful genuflection at the altar of Consumption.⁹ As Leach’s research on the strategies of display and the production of desire indicates, early store decorators considered themselves responsible for answering ‘the public’s’ secular need for beauty, even as they actively sought to help people to evolve new aesthetic standards. Further, I have already argued in the Chapter on women’s magazines that religion, and its awkward partner addiction, are frequently invoked tropes in relation to commoditised mass culture. While both are amenable to innovative theorising which depicts the consumer as ‘elevated’ to a higher plane of consciousness, they have tended, instead, to be used by left-oriented critics insistent on the passivity and false consciousness of people under the all-powerful deception of Capital. In relation specifically to malls, Guassardo’s, “Sacred Consumption” (1979) is an apt case in point. Warren’s “This heaven gives me migraines” (1993) uses the metaphor, but at least critically, rather than as obvious description of the relations that characterise consumption and the production of meaning.

In some respects, Fiske’s deconstruction of the religious trope works well with my own research. For example, many of my arguments in this Chapter as it “Mills around the Mall” substantiate Fiske’s claim that shopping “malls, and the cultural practices, the variety of shoppings that take place within them, are key arenas of struggle, at both economic and ideological levels” (1989:14). Certainly, I hope to have shown that malls are highly ambiguous cultural forms, susceptible to ambivalent rather than easily dismissive response. Fiske uses the trope of resistance hoping to materialise his point that shopping spaces may be creatively transformed by varieties of people into sites which approximate their purposes and desires. In other words, what shopping malls ‘mean’ is not authoritatively and securely authored by Capital and its commodified aura; the expected meaning – co-optation and a closer fit with the system of consumption – is resisted and challenged. In one sense I have no quibble with this. Critics of malls would probably do well to concede a fact in which many consumers have long revelled:

consumption is not passive manipulation, it also entails the *production* of meaning and identity. In outlining the possibilities for the production of mall space through what he calls resistant use, for instance, Fiske refers to mall rats, youngsters who mill around a mall usually with no intention of spending vast sums of money. (Morse distinguishes 'mall rats' from actual spenders through the term "nonconsuming loiterers" [1990:198].) They tend to hang out in such numbers and noise around video arcades, movie houses, eateries and events that mall management views them as a something of a pestilence! In economic terms, they are often a liability, and socially, too, they tend to be considered 'undesirables': they may treat the mall as if it were an adolescent playground, and sometimes antagonise other visitors to the mall and security personnel through their iconoclastic 'in your face' presence. Whether we like it or not, Fiske would probably remind us, these young people are making very public, challenging use of what is, after all, despite the invitations to a mass presence, very private property.

The critic looking to identify creative reworkings of mall space would also be able to cite the relation of women to malls. As I have indicated, for many women, the mall may constitute what Ferrier regards as "an extension of the consumer's domestic space, and at the same time a totally separate 'new world'" (no date:24). They may find in contemporary shopping malls "a sense of empowerment from their competency in shopping operations, their familiarity with the terrain and what they can get out of it" (Ferrier no date:22-23). Paradoxically resistant uses of mall space abound: the cultural commentator could point to malls as places of convenient access and controlled climate which are frequented by the elderly, by families or parts of families in search of entertainment (especially on bad weather weekends and in school holidays), and by unemployed people on the look-out for an opportunity to redistribute wealth. Or the critic might offer a particularly striking, current form of 'mall resistance': the 'hit-and-run' use of the short-term lease by struggling young entrepreneurs in several upmarket malls in Johannesburg. When a mall shop rental becomes vacant for only a brief period – the tenant has left, and the new, long-lease tenant will only occupy the site a month-or-two down the line – cheaper than average rates are frequently available. It is often ambitious but still unestablished young entrepreneurs, otherwise unable to afford a retail space in the mall, who turn this situation to their advantage. They well-understand that theirs are but temporary outlets. Their tenancy is deliberately fleeting, and they tend to remain open for extended hours, cleverly combining the function of retail with that of the coffee bar in order to do so, and after several months, they move on, setting up in another space, and perhaps with another venture. In the language of De Certeau (1984), they tactically occupy a strategic cultural institution.

Following Fiske's metaphor of consumer resistance, all of these uses could be cast as forms of creative appropriation. Indeed, I am sometimes even persuaded by Fiske's assertion that shopping

is the crisis of consumerism: it is where the art and tricks of the weak can inflict the most damage on, and even exert most power over, the strategic interests of the powerful. The shopping mall that is seen as the terrain of guerrilla warfare looks quite different from the one constructed by the metaphor of religion. (1989:14)

Fiske is partially accurate. Televised images of Hamas bombings in an Israeli shopping centre would suggest so, even if the fundamentalist motivations somewhat obscure the guerilla/religious distinctions; so would footage of PAGAD (People Against Gangsterism and Drugs) demonstrations at Cape Town's The Waterfront Mall.

But reservations and uncertainties remain, and I am not led to any easy endorsement of Fiske's claim that "Shopping malls are where the strategy of the powerful is most vulnerable to the tactical raids of the weak" (1989:18). Whatever the usefulness of Fiske's displacement of

emphasis from passive worship to active struggle, then, his comments demand a critical reply. Unlike Fiske, I would not hurry to supplant metaphors of malls as places of uncritical worship with metaphors of explicit consumer *resistance* and even warfare; 'struggle' and 'variety' need not be forced into the aggressive (some would say, masculinist) trope of guerilla encounter. (Fiske's position is clearly, if with insufficient acknowledgement and even less philosophical subtlety, derived from De Certeau [1984]. Fiske does not manage, for instance, to stage the overtly oppositional and 'polemological' aspects of consumption alongside the more elusively 'poetic' aspects of De Certeau's work. Fiske's conception of 'resistance' is curiously *inert*, one-dimensional. It is either self-evident or evidently non-existent; spectacular rather than uneven and insecure.)

Part of my difficulty is that it is never easy to say, in relation to consumer culture, where resistance is overt, complete, implicit and/or partial; where resistance is manifest as aggressive refusal, or as a tactic so clandestine, to use De Certeau's terms (1984), as to be almost indistinguishable from endorsement. Again using De Certeau (1984): is it simple to say which spaces are those of the guerilla opposition, and which those of an increasingly complex 'marginal majority' of which we are all part? Nor is it always possible to decide when the term 'resistance' is useful merely as a nicely-turned figure of speech, and when the consumer agency implied by the metaphor is able to be sanctioned in those consumption contexts which involve actual, violent confrontation.

Let me offer an example. When erstwhile Bophuthatswana leader Lucas Mangope proved unwilling to have this so-called independent state participate in South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994, Mmabatho's Megacity shopping centre was the site – literally – of struggle and outrage. Watched by police, people broke plate glass windows or simply walked into shops and engaged in what the press called 'affirmative shopping', 'liberating' televisions, sofas, soft drinks, whatever consumer goods their oppressed circumstances and imaginations desired. This continued until the looting and looters were stopped – 'arrested' – by the South African military. Does this Megacity example of a mob refusing the ideal of a rational public comprise a positively active transformation of the semiotic 'refusals' referred to by Fiske? Is it of the same order as the youthful shoplifter and the mall-marauding gang? The common-enough phenomenon of the mall mega-heist? The window shopper who simply looks, or the youth who 'spends' mainly time in the mall with friends? I cannot authoritatively determine whether these examples are all equally understandable as refusals, appropriations, incorporations. At any rate, 'resistance' seems not to be able to theorise this for me.

Since I am interested in producing complex readings of the ways in which people make empirically and symbolically meaningful use of 'the mall', I remain circumspect about the easy homogeneity through which consumption and consumers are represented in the metaphor of resistance. Theorists cannot hope to characterise the range of activities and situations that occur in malls and in consumers' making sense of malls by invoking a coherently-imagined figure of *explicit* challenge. Rather like the stereotypical figure of religion, indeed, resistance turns on an *antithetical* logic rather than on an unsettling both/and. It is worthwhile remarking, too, that 'resistance' is a conceptual cul de sac partly on account of its lineage. It is a residue from the kinds of cultural studies research which proposed that the only way to enable critics positively to recuperate subcultures such as punk was to emphasise their dramatically oppositional agency in relation to consumerism. The culture of consumption, as it were, remained necessarily to be avoided, rejected, resisted, for it was the conformist, bovine 'culture' of the status quo which the subculture's members were challenging. (Within the subcultural framework, too, resistance was primarily a male prerogative. The resistant male spectacle somehow managed to reconcile itself

with any number of more-or-less traditionally subservient roles for women. Clearly, resistance as the fundamental figure of consumer response to consumer culture cannot be easily endorsed.)

To raise questions concerning both the figurative and literal aspects of resistance as an *oppositional* concept supposedly central to popular practice in contemporary culture, is not to disallow altogether the notion of resistance as one form of transformative agency in people's reworking or reinventing of mall space. Nor need it be to reassert the notion of mall as passive consumption, despite the uneven pessimism that informs Morse's critique of the notion of resistance in a contemporary cultural world that is saturated in technological mediation. As she observes, although

we may perceive no alternative, no one forces people to watch television or to drive...on the freeway, or to go to the mall or to buy anything on display there or on television. But few indeed resist. One prescription for an aesthetic mode of resistance to consumer culture requires the passerby to remain bewitched on this side of the window, glass, or mirror, poised at any moment between perfection and lack, never cashing in desire for the disappointment of fulfilment. But aesthetic resistance depends on an older disposition of the subject in relation to the spectacle of an imaginary world framed and discrete behind glass. The cycle of consumption in a 'Highway Comfort' culture is designed for maximum mobility and circulation of a consumer inside the imaginary world of images and objects. (Morse 1990:210)

At moments, Morse's point is my own: to privilege resistance when theorising cultural forms and practices such as malls and shopping is to use an anachronistic lexicon; the distinction between inside and outside has become less easy, even impossible, to make. One aspect of Morse's thesis, indeed, would be that since we live, as it were, inside a mall, so interanimated are the matrices of life *in* consumer culture, it is misguided simply to imagine for oneself a superior critical position external to consumption. At other moments, however, Morse's argument veers towards a circularity which appears to imply that because the "cycle of consumption" is so self-sufficiently complete in harnessing to itself apparently disparate modes like mall, driving on the freeway and watching television, no resistance is possible. (Nevertheless, she ends her paper with an appeal for more critical, responsible uses of mass mediation.)

The situation is convoluted. At best, my own Chapter on malls may serve to remind the academic researcher that attempts to theorise mall space in relation to contemporary culture cannot simply reinvoké familiar intellectual constructions of the 'popular' *against* the consumerist: forms of folk, workingclass or subcultural practice which somehow retain pure meaning against the mindless consumer culture that is the mall. Instead, I ask us to see that popular and indeed academic practices intersect awkwardly with, rather than simply resist or refuse, contemporary consumer culture. The landscapes of consumption and leisure of which malls are a part contribute to the formation of the individual and collective consciousnesses of us all, so that malls cannot be 'disappeared' in the service of an argument which imagines that they are homogeneously banal or repressive forms, or that they can be coherently 'resisted'.

In this Chapter, what I am working with, and towards, then, is an elusive, provisional kind of knowledge about mall and shopping malls, rather than one convinced of its (oppositional or traditional) authority. 'The mall' is a form whose increasing frequency and often vast physical dimensions tend to reinforce in the minds of many cultural commentators associations of unbounded capitalist egos, and cynically exploitative entrepreneurial interests. But any reading of malls should acknowledge difficult negotiations of cultural capital – meanings which are volatile, unstable, insecure, material *and* symbolic. If the mall figures prominently as a form of contemporary cultural knowledge, one which many kinds of people collate into the cognitive experiential maps of their living spaces, this knowledge is not immutably engineered or fixed, but repeatedly shifting; ambivalent rather than absolute. As Moore characterises malls in an essay appropriately entitled "Mall-content", these

places occupy a strange territory that is both public and private, and that is why viewing them as simply postmodern pleasure palaces or miserable temples to consumption is inadequate. They cut across the private and the public in an entirely new way. These are public spaces for private experiences. Postmodern theorists, who can never imagine any kind of collectivity, neglect this public aspect while the critics of shopping centres won't accept the pleasures of the individual shopper or the differences between different kinds of shopping centres....Whatever happens, the dream of plenitude 'everything under one roof' will continue. (1992:215)

Any discussion of mall space in an academic context, I suggest, needs to move between the conscious efforts of designers, architects and other 'agents' of Capital to structure consumers' experiences in ways that maximise profits, and shoppers' own, often creative incorporation of malls into the meaningful practices of their own lives. It follows that for the researcher of late-twentieth-century culture, 'the mall' ought not to be considered inherently banal or repressive; neither is it automatically a liberating new Eden. Critical commentary on the mall ought to admit that no cultural practice or form carries an inherent politics, whether progressive, reactionary, oppressive or liberatory. "Each practice must be evaluated and understood in its own context" (Warren 1993:177). 'The mall' is at once a common cultural signifier – a necessary generic convenience that facilitates grand hypotheses about the meanings of contemporaneity, *and* an overgeneralised category which demands to be realised as the particular histories of individual mall sites and of individual consumption. The potential of the place-form is always realised in its use, rather than being fixed in an immobile built structure. Such recognitions seem crucial in a South Africa which has inherited the built forms of apartheid, even as a new government struggles to make material – in houses, clinics, schools and sites of leisure and consumption – the promises of social justice through which it came to power. Like Morse in her Australian context, then, I am given in late 1990s South Africa to make a case for a study of the mall which occurs at the "crossroads of magic and positivism" (1993b:299), since at

every possible 'level' of analysis – and there are very many indeed with such a complex continuous social event [as the mall] – shopping centres are overwhelmingly and constitutively paradoxical....On the one hand, they seem so monolithically present – solid, monumental, rigidly and indisputably on the landscape, and in our lives. On the other hand, when you try to dispute with them, they dissolve at any one point into a fluidity and indeterminacy. (1993b:298)

Notes to Chapter 3

1. In order to enforce strict racial segregation, the South African government in 1950 introduced the Group Areas Act, under which legislation “the government could lay down that any area of the country should be reserved for one race group” (Omer-Cooper 1987:198). See Lemon (1991) for the associated effects upon the formation of South African cities. The Group Areas Act was repealed by the Abolition of Racially-based Land Measures Act: Act 108 of 1991. Under apartheid, witness the much-publicised forced removals from Sophiatown and the remarketing of this once-culturally vibrant area as the symbolically-resonant Afrikaans suburb of ‘Triomf’ (‘Triumph’). Under a more democratic government, witness too the problems associated with efforts to revitalise District Six: the townhouse units planned for this area entail a degree of capitalist gentrification and privatisation which to all intents and purposes preclude previous inhabitants and/or their descendants from re-acquiring their property. This is often associated with the re-ghettoising of the poor into marginal enclaves and the colonising of the reclaimed space as sites of touristic cultural consumption and (upper) middle class residence. South African cities have seen their (un)fair share of such movement.
2. De Certeau (1984) makes analogous points concerning the ways in which *strategically* named and linguistically monumentalised place ‘proper’ may be re-fashioned through the *tactics* of wily consumers. I will not immerse myself in this here, since to do so would entail working my way through a number of convoluted conceptual labyrinths, among which is De Certeau’s debatable opposition of meanings predicated on what he regards as an immutable *space* that is strategically occupied and governed by systematic social Structure, and a more transient, fleeting *time-based* use of form by a marginalised majority of consumers. Clearly my own work is influenced by De Certeau’s ideas, but the argument I am making does not imagine that the ‘structural totality’ is coherent, willed and strategic to the extent that De Certeau would have it. Strategies and tactics, then, are less binaristic modes of experience than De Certeau leads one to believe.
3. I cannot do justice, here, to the complexities of Jameson’s position. They involve conceptual evolutions, as well as backtrackings over time. Overall, his work is characterised by a vacillating belief and disbelief in the utopian potentials of mass cultural forms.
4. The paradoxes are tangled. Bennett (1988) reminds us that if The Crystal Palace exhibition displayed more goods to many more people than had previously been possible, it also managed this new mass of consumers by means of structured admission fees: high prices midweek, for instance, and bargain rates on a Saturday, virtually guaranteed the cultural homogeneity of the crowd on particular days, keeping like with like. Notions of economic ‘fraternity’ or its compromise continue to cluster around The Crystal Palace, the site of which is presently being restored: Worpole, completely disavowing consumer culture as potentially democratic or even responsible, remarks that the “site of Crystal Palace, the great public exhibition centre of the nineteenth century, is being restored with taxpayers’ money to provide a site for a Holiday Inn hotel and leisure centre, requiring Bromley Council to promote a parliamentary Bill to amend the original Crystal Palace Act to take out all public access clauses” (1991:143).
5. An excellent essay on several of the topics under discussion in this section of the Thesis is Bennett’s “Hegemony, Ideology, Pleasure: Blackpool” (1986).

6. As much may be gleaned from the 1992 Commemorative Supplement from which the advertisement under discussion is taken. As is especially the case with texts in which advertisements and data, editorial and advertorial, infotainment and reputed fact, visual and verbal codes fidget awkwardly alongside each other, 'meaning' is not coherently orchestrated in the welter of textual material that comprises the newspaper supplement. The advertisement for The Workshop, for instance, is immediately below brief pieces on the history and family history of a local shipping agent, and on Kings Sports shop, and it is visually correlated with a colour picture of an inventively-dressed ricksha-puller with his "colourful headgear and traditional decorations...set to provide just as rich and vibrant an atmosphere as in the past" (1992:12). Within the supplement more broadly, we find a storehouse of facts and fictions related to the history of a 100-year-old Durban: reference to Vasco da Gama's "first recorded history of Natal" in 1497 (1992:6); the "discovery of Durban by white settlers in 1823", prior to which "it was inhabited by Zulus under the leadership of Shaka, King of the Zulus" (1992:6); the formation of the town of D'Urban in 1835 by 15 white settlers; the arrival of the Voortrekkers soon afterwards, their presence valuably bolstering the settlement's security; the ransacking of the town by Dingaan in 1838; the establishment of a Voortrekker-controlled Republic of Natalia; the annexing of the town by the British in 1842; the acquiring of borough status in 1854, and city status in 1935. Clearly, 'heritage' here is riven with struggle, and the various writers contributing to the supplement present versions of history that borrow from preferred textbook narratives but at the same time foreground aspects of Durban's past that particularly appeal to the individual journalist on the basis of his or her cultural affiliations.
7. Bowlby's paper discusses 'shopping' as a female pursuit, focussing especially on modes of shopping in late-nineteenth-century French fiction and the magazine *La Dernière Mode*, "a Paris fashion journal which ran to eight issues edited and written in their entirety by Mallarmé" (1987:192).
8. Recent media coverage (Hilton-Barber 1997) of several malls in Gauteng suggests that the mall (both landscaped surrounds and official leisure facilities like movie houses and video arcades) is a popular weekend meeting ground for young adolescents. The high energy level in these urban "baby-teens" is in part attributed not to drink and drugs but to their simulation of 'cool' attitude in their variously tentative or exuberant displays of emergent, often sexual self: they're not on grass but literally loitering around on the grass lawns, "part sincere and part posturing". They are all Looking. Willing themselves to be 'good looking'; willing their evenings to be, like them, 'looking good'; taking pleasure in the comfort that they are, indeed, only looking, rather than having to act on their visual pleasures. "Lurching on the seesaw between childhood and adulthood, 'the grass' is simply the modern version of those adolescent rites of passage dating back to ancient times" (Hilton-Barber 1997:7).
9. Horning points out that architects "abroad are creating vast shopping cathedrals to induce consumers to continue to worship brand icons from Nike and Calvin Klein in New York to Donna Karan and Ralph Lauren in London". She remarks that the "imposing use of space, controlled lighting and sound-proofing induce a hushed sense of reverence around goods made gods". Nevertheless, she acknowledges that such materialisations of a cathedral trope are adopted by designers in "desperation" as they *attempt* to persuade people to purchase preferred brands in "over-supplied consumer societies" (1998:53).

CHAPTER FOUR

Tropes and Trophies: The Lost City 'Discovered'

In this Chapter I discuss The Lost City and its originator Sol Kerzner: place and man are interlinked, contemporary South African phenomena that have elicited dramatic media coverage and popular interest. The Lost City is a themed South African entertainment complex which simulates an archaeological site, and creatively capitalises on the pop-insignia of an ethnic, mythological 'Africa'. This is a theming intended to grant the location a distinctive identity when set in relation to developments of similar scale and purpose elsewhere in the world. As Martin Hall remarks, "the attraction to the three million day visitors anticipated each year, apart from the casino, strip-shows and bars, is the picturesque decay and patina, cracked walls and crumbling icons of the archaeological site" (1995:181). What's to do at The Lost City?

Discover a world of adventure lost for centuries when 63 million litres of water are unleashed into the world's ultimate pleasure playground...and the world's greatest adventure ever imagined begins.

Dare to brave the world's most spectacular waterslide, a dizzying, near-vertical rush from the Temple of Courage. Ride a raging torrent through the tunnels of an ancient goldmine! Cross the Bridge of Time as it trembles with volcanic force...

Explore ancient temples and tangled forests.

Or simply laze away the day on a tropical beach as waves roll gently to a palm-fringed shore. At sundown revel in the excitement of the Hall of Treasures or marvel at the splendour of the exotic Jungle Casino. (*Sunday Times* 1992:10)

Clearly, 'The Lost City experience' represents for the consumer a number of pleasures. These are staged in various, sometimes interconnected worlds of rough and tumble action adventure, sophisticated palatial adventure, and treasure-quest casino adventure, and might well be expected to have diverse audience appeal in terms both of physical and imaginative investment.

Locating The Lost City

As in Chapters 1, 2 and 3 on *Tribute*, women's magazines and shopping malls respectively, part of what I struggle towards in analysing The Lost City is the recognition that contemporary cultural knowledges are likely to be diffusely experienced and comprehended, such that the source of an object or an idea or an image is iteratively displaced rather than located in an essential origin. Given the media material disseminated about The Lost City, for instance, and in fact on account of the broad media image banks to which most urban moderns have access, many South Africans can believe themselves to 'know' the resort without ever having visited it. Even while The Lost City as particular location gives individual specificity to images and narratives about Africa, these are also to some extent extant and 'in place', already swirling in the permeable displacements that comprise commodified cultural relations. The resort is thus figuratively familiar, even though one may have no bodily experience of the specific site. Notwithstanding the resort's vast architectural form, then, a much-publicised structure such as The Lost City locates itself in the imagination through diverse mediated representations: newspapers, magazines, television, and advertising generally. South Africans, especially, cannot avoid having 'found' The Lost City somewhere in the media, whether in the form of advertorial, enamoured feature, or cynical comment, or as a loose repertoire of symbols and images associated both with imperialism and with the alluring promise of leisure and a temporary escape into luxury. What my own Chapter acknowledges is that The Lost City is imaged and imagined in manifold rather than monolithic ways. This multiplicity (clearly to be differentiated from the linear imperative of an argument predicated upon the culture industry's *duplicity*) may be further articulated through Arjun Appadurai's concept of 'media-scapes'. Media-scapes, he explains, provide

large and complex repertoires of images, narratives and ethnoscapas in which the world of commodities and the world of news and politics are profoundly mixed. What this means is that many audiences throughout the world experience the media themselves as a complicated interconnected repertoire of print, celluloid, electronic screens, and billboards. The lines between the realistic and the fictional are blurred, so that...audiences...construct imagined worlds which are chimerical, aesthetic, even fantastic objects. (1993:330-31)

As I have already argued in Chapter 3 on the mall, our readings of the built environment are likely to involve multiple and often contradictory investments, even as there tend to be in circulation numerous, apparently naturalised meanings or myths. The Lost City, for instance, obviously trades in what are often called mythic stereotypes of Africa. Yet what we need to understand, here, is that myth need not be equated with easy consensus rather than argument, or with false consciousness rather than meaningful mediation. As a serious look at The Lost City should indicate, conflict is part of the mythic negotiating process. Myths about places, people, countries must struggle to present and secure a uniformity that is constantly denied them on account of their very selectivity in relation to the histories from which they are constructed. All mythologies foreground certain parts of actual history while suppressing others, precisely as they struggle to function as narratives with the desire to speak for a culture as a whole. Myth, as a consensus narrative, works to articulate a culture's central beliefs "in a widely accessible 'language,' an inheritance of shared stories, plots, character types, cultural symbols, narrative conventions" (Real 1989:57). Yet this conserving of cultural capitals is pitted against a "continual testing, rehearsal, and revision of cultural experiences and values" (Real 1989:129). Similarly, myth, when understood to be part of the commodification of late-twentieth-century culture, entails not only conflict, but complicated degrees of consciousness and overt cross-referencing. Thus if the design envelope of The Lost City consciously invokes British imperial-colonial mythologies in its structure and theme, the resort also intersects with popular desire and practice in uneven, unpredictable ways: there is no close fit between ethics, style and architecture. Erratic, haphazard and unpredictable human potentials must also be admitted into those repressive historical-ideological narratives that detractors insist are always already 'written into' the story of The Lost City.

It is possible, therefore, to read the extravagant promise of The Lost City through Barthes's essay on another monumental edifice, The Eiffel Tower. The Lost City illustrates Barthes's point about the profound double movement of architecture, which "is always dream and function, expression of utopia and instrument of convenience" (1982:239). Like the Eiffel Tower, The Lost City, in its suggestive gigantism, fulfils a "great imaginary function...which quite naturally touches on the borders of the irrational" (1982:239). The Eiffel Tower, originally built for the 1889 Paris Exhibition, has become part of "the universal language of travel," a pre-eminent form of cultural display signifying 'France', a "symbol of Paris [replicated]...everywhere on the globe where Paris is to be stated as an image" (1982:239). In analogous ways, Sun International seems to intend that The Lost City acquire a substitutive metonymic power, reverberating within tourist discourse as a premier (Southern) 'African' signifier, alongside spectacular locations such as the Victoria Falls, wild animals, exotic scenery, and excitingly different adventure.

To begin with, though, perhaps mapping of a simpler sort is needed. If The Lost City is "the most audacious and most deafeningly hyped theme resort in the southern hemisphere, at least" (Milne 1992:7), possibly the most expensive single resort ever built, how and where do you find it? Were it the late 1980s and early 1990s, and were you travelling from Johannesburg, a South African metropolis close to the resort, then you could have taken the Sun City Express, a since-discontinued joint venture between the South African Transport Services and Sun International. (So as discursively to intersect with the adventure awaiting the visitor to the Sun International

pleasureland, the train-ride was billed as a romantic and glamorous substitute for travel by car or bus.) Alternatively, you could still, today, fly Sun Air to The Lost City from any of South Africa's major centres. There are even Kerzner-jokes around which claim that the billionaire intends to buy up an inefficient South African Airways and transform it into a streamlined aerial megaventure bearing the moniker, 'AeroSol'. There are certainly many ways for the potential visitor to be transported to what has been called Sun International's 'Garden of Eden'. What you need at the moment, though, is a method of transportation that artfully combines the literal and the metaphoric, the physical and the conceptual. Try a map of what were then South Africa's 'tribal homelands' and use it to begin plotting your way into the Chapter by mapping the location of The Lost City. (See Figure 5.i.) No luck? Still a little lost? No doubt I ought to have mentioned, before you set out, that with political changes in South Africa the borders have been redrawn. This makes The Lost City a little easier to locate, both cartographically and ideologically, than in the piecemeal bantustan system of apartheid creation. You can find The Lost City here, on a map of South Africa's north eastern areas, although leisure-adventurers would also be well-advised to consult road maps from the South African Automobile Association. (See Figure 5.ii.) Then, so as to overlay the scientific accuracy of geographic cartography with the fantastical creativity of the theme park, the following "Nu-Map will help you discover the hidden treasures of The Lost City For Yourself...". (See Figure 5.iii.)

By now, you have some idea of where we are, and the material of the previous three chapters should also have gone a long way towards familiarising you with the terrain I intend to cover. Clearly, it is not that simple to situate The Lost City within cultural-conceptual landscapes, and the English Studies practitioner, at least, may in desperation turn away from the 'legend' encoded in maps to the more poetic descriptive key of the travel description. Here is a *Harpers & Queen* journalist on The Palace of The Lost City, considered by many to be the 'crown jewel' of the resort:

It is built on a staggering scale. The exterior architecture is dominated by soaring towers decorated by elaborate carvings of wild animals. The entrance chamber is six storeys high and many ceilings are hand-painted with the flora and fauna of the African jungle. There is marble and mosaics and semi-precious stones and luxury, luxury everywhere. Surrounding The Palace is a 25-hectare 'instant' jungle created from vast mature trees and threaded with paths meandering by cascades and waterfalls. The special effects are awesome. If you want true escapism, a world far removed from the drab monotony of everyday life, The Palace of The Lost City is for you. (1994:115)

We here confront The Purple Prose so often characteristic of the travelogue as it appears in consumer magazines. Is not the mark of a properly analytic intelligence, though, the ability to represent The Lost City in a less overtly persuasive idiom; to describe The Lost City in a way at once pictorially adequate and soberly academic, giving the site its descriptive due without succumbing to the sycophantic? The problem, however, is that the very vocabularies needed to effect the description are those which tend to elicit intellectual scepticism: vast, huge, monumental, instant, embellished, themed, escapism.... Can I possibly say that The Lost City, with its soaring and crumbling, vaguely North African turrets; its gigantic stone carvings and monumental wildlife bronzes; its tusks, skins, and multi-ethnic decor quoted from southern African indigenous cultures via the design centres of Europe and California; its palatial, imperial opulence and extravagant outdoor adventure repertoire encompassing ruins, rope bridges, water slides and instant patination...defies description?¹ My syntactically cumbersome melange will have to suffice, in conjunction with the visual key of Figures 5.iv and 5.v. (What can I do, at this early stage in the Chapter, but pretend that photographic encoding is transparent rather than ideologically-mediated and ask you to see for yourself?)

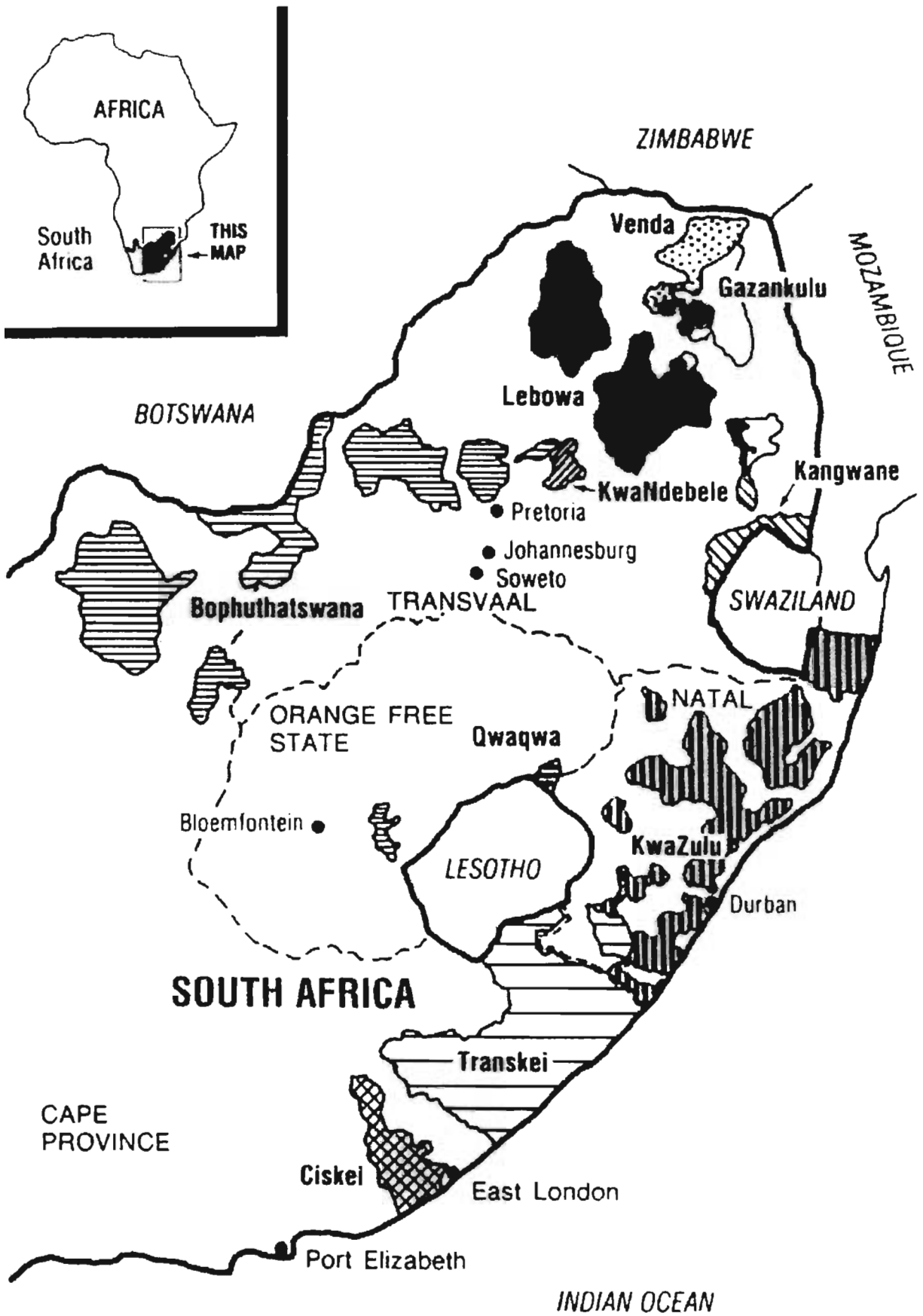


Figure 5.i

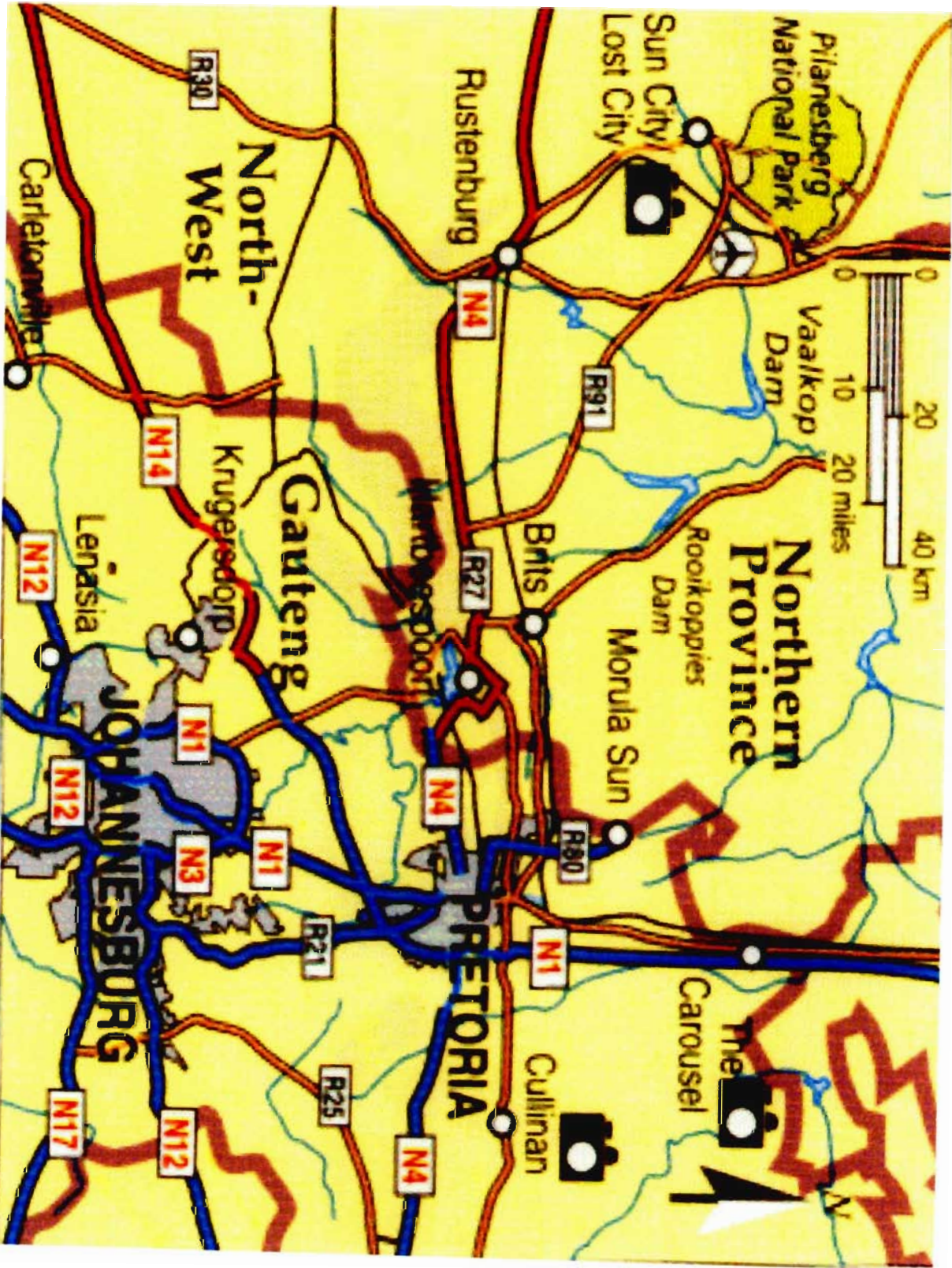


Figure 5.ii

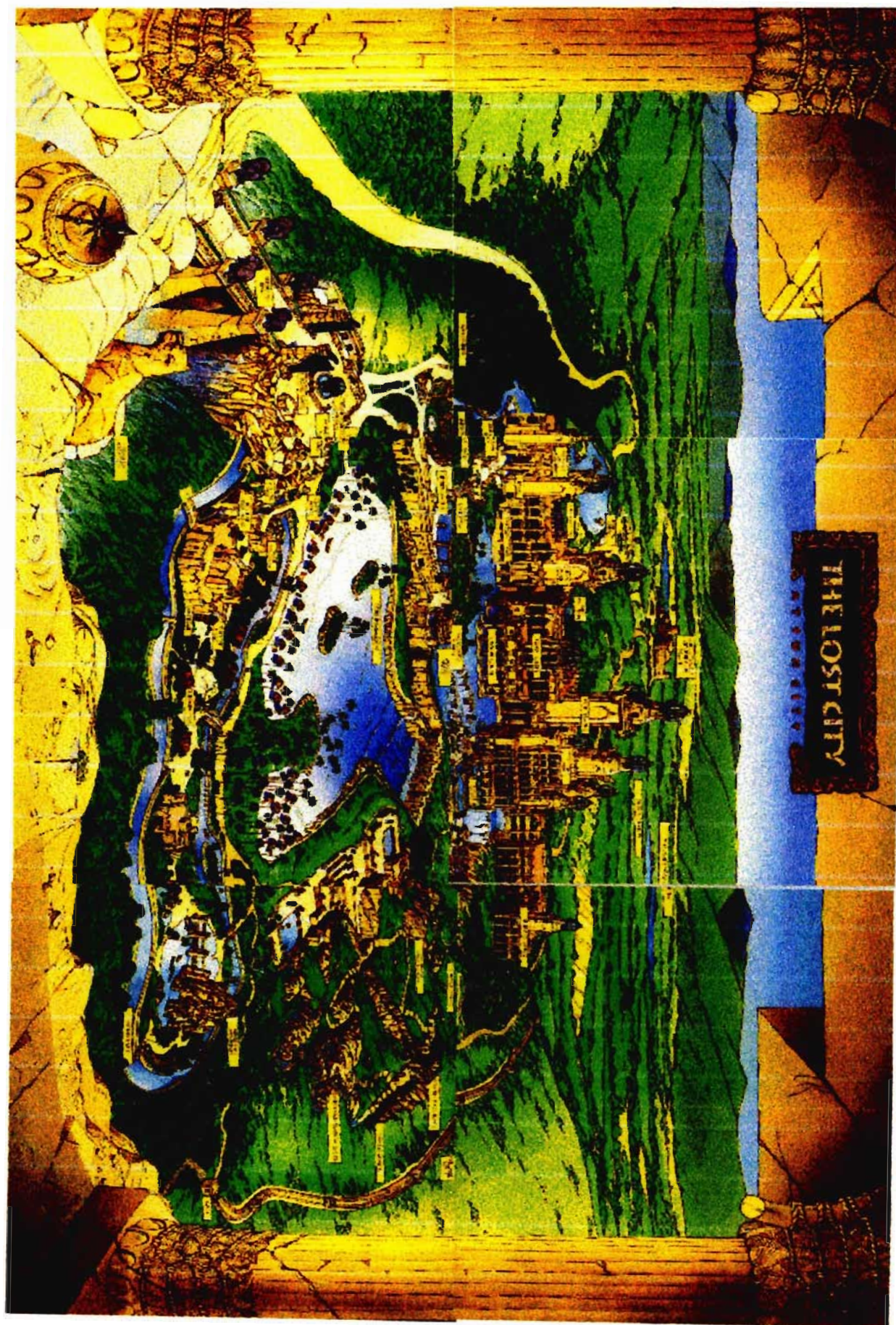


Figure 5.iii

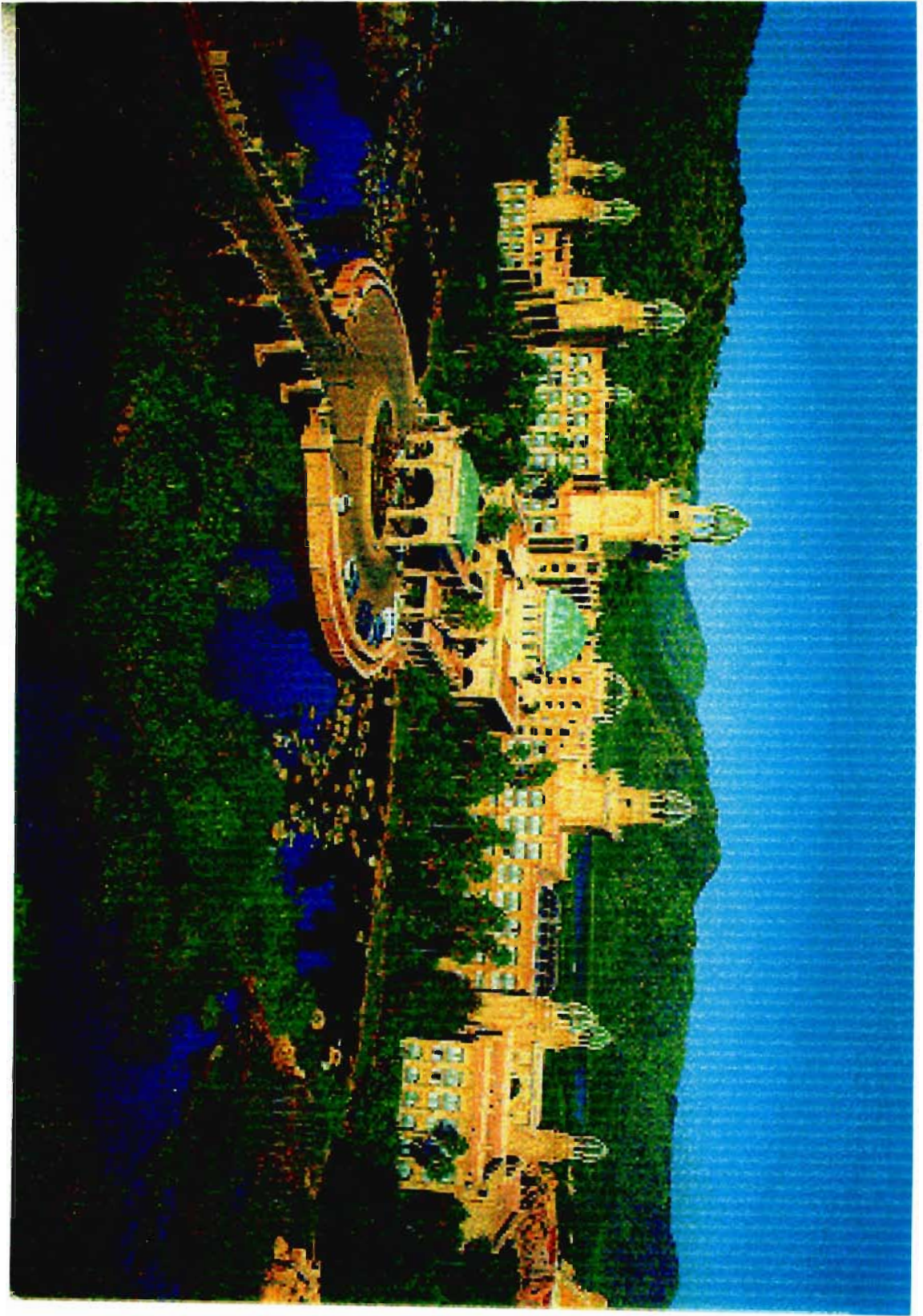


Figure 5.iv

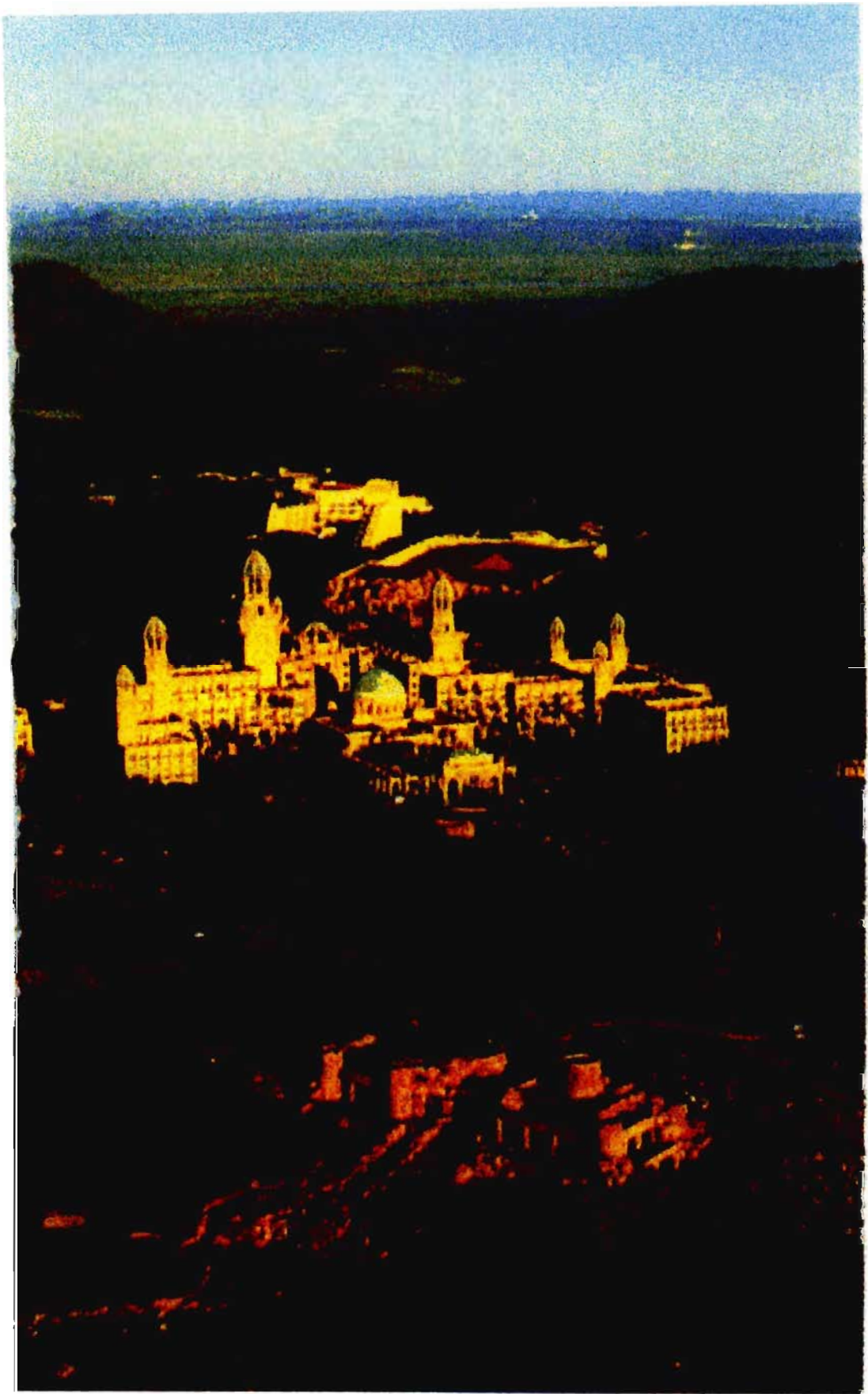


Figure 5.v

Launched in late 1992, The Lost City is perhaps the most ambitious of the thirty-two pleasure domes conceived by the flamboyant hotel magnate Sol Kerzner, chair of the hubristically-named Sun International, and developed by the Californian resort design partnership of Wimberley Allison Tong and Goo. The resort is situated "about one hundred miles north of Johannesburg on eighty arid acres surrounded by bushveld". The 800 million rand (US \$300-million) hotel complex is "resplendent with a 338-room Palace Hotel and accompanying casino, a grand fan-shaped ['Valley of the Waves'] pool with 'surfable, six-foot-high waves,' ...five water slides, and a sixty-acre jungle featuring a rain forest, a desert and a swamp....Like the mythical Xanadu brought to life by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, The Lost City 'is a fabulous work of fiction, for nothing in it is real'"² (M. Murray 1994:67).

Given such fabulous invention, it would be foolhardy to deny the ideological work performed by The Lost City, a resort built in what was then known as Bophuthatswana, an oxymoronic Tswana homeland of apartheid origin. Sun International's widely inventive African theme park was built, with perverse Baudrillardian appropriateness, within a 'country' that was considered by many not 'really' to exist. 'Bop' as it was popularly and with deliberate bathos labelled by (white) South Africans, was a welter of contradictions, not least of which was its fragmented, geographically dispersed form. It consisted of seven separate, landlocked areas extending over the western Transvaal, the northern Cape and southern Orange Free State, a sprawling, piecemeal geography at once pre- and postmodern which covered 40 000 square kilometres of comparatively arid terrain. Once part of the northern Cape Province, the area had in 1972 been designated by the Pretoria government the homeland of the Tswana people, the very name 'Bophuthatswana' meaning 'that which binds the Tswana'. But the homeland was not recognised as home by its supposed tribal affiliates, and nor, after being granted its so-called independence from South Africa in December 1977, was it acknowledged by the international community as an independent republic. Independent 'Bop' was internationally perceived as the cardboard showpiece of a mere puppet-premier, Lucas Manyane Mangope. It was not simply that Bophuthatswana relied heavily on the political and economic maintenance of the South African government: the country was understood to be an expedient invention of a manipulative apartheid logic in terms of which black people were to be denied the benefits which accrued from citizenship of a wealthy, first-world country, with the catch-22 corollary that anything of value to be found in the homelands would be for the benefit of white South Africa. It was, in the most iniquitous of senses, an internal colony of the apartheid state, and it is this history which has inevitably been foregrounded in appraisals of The Lost City. Like several other such areas which were at once within but without South Africa's borders, for instance, the bantustan homeland of Bophuthatswana existed in relation to South Africa as both black labour reservoir and white pleasure dome. Between 1979 and 1984, for example, the Sun City resort of which The Lost City would later be part was created. It comprised three hotels, a casino, swimming pools, a man-made lake and internationally renowned 'Million Dollar Challenge' golf course, all set in landscaped grounds in the Pilanesberg range, north of the town of Rustenberg, and close to the Pilanesberg National Park. My account intentionally reads like an innocuous travel guide and, in the interests of fixing the tourist's attention on the 'fabulous' aspects of the resort, has so far intentionally occluded a number of important details.

For example, The Lost City's eclectically African theming was strategically intended to reinvigorate the jaded chrome and glass modernism of the Sun City entertainment complex: while still lucrative, the resort had since its heyday in the early 1980s lost some of its distinction, especially for an international tourist market that was increasingly interested in experiencing Africa as difference rather than as a mere replication of what was on offer 'at home'. Further, with

the beginning of the development of The Lost City in 1989, Sun International would contribute to South Africa's conservation coffers by undertaking the updating of the Pilanesberg National Park and the designing of adventure safaris. Generous financial assistance, yes, but for many critics, it raises the spectre of self-interested and manipulative corporate investment. Nor can the ostensibly innocent description of the guidebook genre begin to imply the role played by Bophuthatswana in what I'll risk calling the white South African psyche. The Sun City hotel, casino and entertainment development within which The Lost City is situated illustrates Peter Stallybrass and Allon White's argument concerning the bourgeois relegation of the carnivalesque to the margins of both geographic and psychic space (1986). The 'Lost City complex', understood not simply as built form but as psychosis and pathology, is in some ways produced by South African cities proper. It constitutes the repressed 'heart of darkness' of the South African urban nexus. Sun City, the first of Sun International's Bophuthatswana resorts, *allowed* forms of licence that were censoriously managed by the Afrikaner nationalists within the South African state. Thus live topless titillation, cinematic pornography and gambling, along with the migrant black labour refused a permanent place in the apartheid city, were strategically displaced to the margins of white South Africa, from whence, paradoxically, they could then be solicited with moral-legal impunity for labour, leisure, lust, and lucre. In a label derived from Las Vegas, Sun City was often colloquially referred to as 'Sin City', pointing primarily to the sins of the flesh but, read deconstructively, also to those of apartheid planning. (Radio South Africa journalist Barry Jones said of Sun City in the 1990s: "When it opened just one decade ago, the mysteries of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden gave it a certain sinful aura...all of which is very much old hat today" [1991:243].) With anti-apartheid entertainment boycotts against South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s, Sun City was also marketed to South Africans as their lifeline to a global performance culture. For international musicians and performing artists, Sun City was a discursive loop-hole, a euphemistically 'non' South African site at which they might legitimately perform. Sun City was conveniently close to some of South Africa's major centres; its 'Million Dollar' golf-course, casinos, hotels and theatres offered culture variously sophisticated and salacious; and it was still possessed of extensive areas of conservation-managed wilderness in the form of the adjacent Pilanesberg Reserve. It exemplified the marketing slogan that had been adopted for the greater South African region: "A World in One Country". This did not convince the dedicated anti-apartheid lobby, however, and the venue was the object of a protracted campaign by artists like Bruce Springsteen who were opposed to institutionalised racism: "Don't Play Sun City", ran the slogan.³ This injunction slowly began to lose force in the latter half of the 1980s, and when stars such as Elton John were willing to be hosted by Sun City, it seemed clear that the venue had 'arrived', achieving international sanction.

Clearly, there is a good deal of densely ideological unpacking that can be carried out in relation to The Lost City. The most dramatically damning way of uncovering The Lost City, of revealing the resort in all its morally dubious and aesthetically tacky monstrosity, is to engage in a detailed analysis of the political-economy of South and southern Africa.⁴ Even in the brief yet densely metaphoric space of the lyric poem, Kelwyn Sole determines to convey The Lost City's political-psychological compromise. (Sole's materialist critical-creative orientation is well-known in South African intellectual circles.)

The Lost City

(*"Imaginary beings, in a real landscape"*. Kim Stanley Robinson.)

By the Kong Gates we paused
but could not think
beyond the new vistas

given to us unfolded. Two alabaster parrots
 betrayed our trust
 and did not move. We meandered
 through baobabs, rain forest, a desert
 past exotic llamas – a world in one country –
 interrupting no creature of breath. Latex rocks groaned
 beneath our hard heels, and an electric cable
 whipped the breeze
 hissed.

 At the Valley of Courage
 there was only the splat and slurry of piped water
 awaiting us playmates
 and our fall.

All our cities are lost. By the one
 armed bandits we slouch down and forget
 to weep. (Sole 1993:7)

While this is not the place for a detailed analysis of Sole's poem, it is worth noting the emphasis that he places on the sterile artificiality and simulated quality of Sun International's Lost City kingdom. His images are those of contrived gardens; latex rocks; snake-like cables/cable-like snakes; exotically aestheticised and/or inanimately stylised animals. He purposefully affects the imperial gaze of the tourist-traveller, conjuring the bizarrely displaced 'neverland' quality of the location that he is expected to survey, and managing also to suggest the alienating human and mental labours that are demanded in order for him, as 'visitor' to the Lost City, to exhibit the pretence of play and pleasure. Yet the motif informing Sole's poem – the Garden of Eden, and the Fall from innocence at once religious and representative of a sexual knowledge – is circumscribed by the very ideology of nostalgia that he would use in order to hold the developers of The Lost City accountable. Significantly, Sole's companion poem, published alongside "The Lost City" in *The Southern African Review of Books*, is a piece entitled "Hillbrow". This is a densely populated, culturally syncretic, and in some respects even derelict, urban area of central Johannesburg.

Hillbrow

She was lying in the doorway fast food

shivering but by that time the cops appeared.
 They made us stand crammed up to a shop
 display – real close – with our hands
 on the word CAFE while they went through
 every pocket but

there was nothing. If you walk downhill
 the city will advance at you its stone strides
 through hawkers' shouts which mystify
 belief with all obsessive use of number.
 Late suns silver earth and eat across
 our horizon.

We live within a can. Wending homewards
 to fossick through each other's thoughts and bodies
 until the hours gunshots begin to worm
 their usual way through unclosed curtains
 I see you as a cheek – a jaw – a hand –
 as two shadows

jostling underneath your eyebrows
 while street lights fracture across and basrelief
 your dreaming face. Night is restless
 with racketing cars and steps and voices:
 there is no place to hide from our own
 vendible reflections

dancing and teasing in every window.
 Everyone in the street is desperate to belong here
 or to leave. The mind floats like a
 hawk and knows: yet no matter what we
 do our eyes and conversations keep on

missing steps (Sole 1993:7)

Again, I do not propose to analyse the poem with any rigour. But the images of isolation and social decay, the fragmented commodification of human relations and missing connections which populate “Hillbrow”: all of these imply that even *real* South African cities are being lost, left, forfeited; their human potentials being brutalised by the very capitalist structures which invest energy and imagination in speculative developments like *The Lost City*.⁵

The overwhelming tone of both poems (and I use this adjective deliberately) is one of despair. The poet laments a number of deeply felt but almost inexpressible losses whose collective magnitude is such that he cannot imagine a hopeful future. As Sole claims in “*The Lost City*”: “All our cities are lost”. But if both imagined and actual cities are beyond redemption, where does that leave the individual who is looking for life, or for a life that, in its simulations, is at least ‘life-like’? In search of the “late suns silver earth” of a residual countryside, or something styled to resemble the natural? Given the implied attitude in each poem to such mediated experience, this leaves us nowhere but back in Sole’s sad scenarios, which fetishise loss in a mode supposedly the obverse of that mobilised by Sun International’s trope of ‘the lost city’, but in fact perversely even more nihilistic in denying the imaginative capacity to envisage meaningful South African futures.

In relation to *The Lost City*, I suggest, it is possible to develop a sympathetic understanding of how the tropes of adventure and escape that are reworked in the resort design are both socially specific and enduring, and intersect with people’s needs, fears, desires, and search for personal and national esteem. As in the case of super malls, the mega-structure and monumentalism of *The Lost City* could testify to fears concerning sociopolitical change and transition, even as their scale and Faustian transformation of the environment apparently announce economic security, and control. Without foregrounding an instrumental ideology critique, further, we might sympathetically hypothesise ‘loss’ as part of an early 1990s national imaginary. It was as white South Africa felt itself to have ‘lost’ its cities to black Africa, to the ‘black peril’ of a returning repressed occasioned by the repeal of influx control laws and, later, by the formation of a new political dispensation, that the monumental power of capital turned most visibly to the production of leisure citadels predicated paradoxically on wish-fulfilment, on urban escape, and on ostensibly endless yet reassuringly monitored consumption and thematically controlled safety.

Perhaps I am being naive, though, in asking for such ‘loss’ to be read with any intellectual sympathy. Theming, for example, has habitually been considered a dubious means of projecting an identity that is under threat. For many cultural commentators, the theming of the urban environment is not an answer of any kind to the crises which are said to plague the individual who lives under the shadow of forms of ‘millennarial loss’. As my discussion of shopping malls has already outlined, theming, whether in its particularly South African or more global lineations, is generally deemed by an intellectual cognoscenti to be the material expression of a pervasive

epochal, 'existential' crisis, in which late Capitalism's reification of humanity leads to the banalisation of community as manufactured or simulated thematic unity. It does not help matters, either, that theming in architecture and design has a history which is in many respects tied to privilege. We can exemplify this in conveniently rudimentary ways. The eighteenth century in England and Europe, for instance, saw a glut of upper class, aristocratic follies in a wealth of styles: Chinese pagodas, Ancient ruins, Doric temples, "Hermit's cells, Rococo grottoes, broken aqueducts, Gothic dairies", and in Versailles Park in 1781 Marie Antoinette had built for her amusement an English-inspired, mock medieval *hameau*, complete with milkmaid outfit and silver pail (Jordan 1969:281). At around the same time, the Prince Regent was toying with ideas for an Indian pavilion at Brighton. In the field of literary culture, several Romantic poets would a little later extend this rather formalised fascination with landscape, nostalgia and an architectural exotic into both their actual experiences of and their representations of the sublime and the everyday, the heroic and the ordinary. And we know of their penchant for 'theming' their own writing by exploring the self in relation to ruins, ancient civilisations and structural grandeur. Most prominently at issue in many thematicised experiences prior to the twentieth century is their comparative exclusivity. They are often referred to as instances of an elite, leisured class at play with the past, such that 'history' existed on a superficial plane synonymous with 'newness' and 'depthlessness'. These arguments can be transferred with little unease to contemporary sites of themed retail and leisure. Yet the developers of contemporary themed projects have often sought in the media to harness their endeavours to rhetorics of democracy and the extending of leisure and enjoyment to a public at once heterogeneous and mass. The first Disneyland in Anaheim, California is regularly cited as the originary, spectacular instance, although the lineage also glances back to earlier thematisations evident in world fairs and exhibitions, and to the overall 'theme' of pleasure and instruction by which these were informed.

The popularisation of themed relaxation in the twentieth century has also meant a vigorous commercialisation of the activities associated with leisure. Aside from their residual 'elitisms' (one must, after all, belong to the wage- or salary-earning fraction in order to afford their pleasures), late-twentieth-century ventures into themed environment often entail the over-refining of a potentially 'mass' logic of early forms of commercial theming by speculative capital. As detractors might remind us, the proliferation of various kinds of themed environments from malls to steakhouses marks the demise of a secure belief in the apparently familiar, homogenised middle class consumer – not a belief in the ideological value of multicultural human variety per se. Let us briefly return to the architectural evolution of the shopping mall from the 1970s to the 1980s. As I have observed, the inward-turning, mass-monolithic mall of the 1970s was an architectural box which attested to a bi-fold failure of the commercial imagination: an inability to grant complex distinctions amongst various kinds of publics, and an inability to understand that these publics could distinguish amongst the kinds of spaces which they took pleasure in frequenting. In comparison 'theming', the predominant marketing principle of the 1980s onwards, has meant the spectacularisation of diversity and difference. But this market segmentation, which corresponds to the rise of niche marketing in the world of magazine publishing, is not inherently democratic, not inherently the mark of developers' sudden willingness to recognise the discriminating abilities of the people envisaged as their 'target markets'. Rather, the strategies of theming in contemporary urban retail-leisure development could be said to be but expediently-pilfered by retail theorists from forms of community politics. In community politics, groups of individuals, working to effect the interests of a specific community, learnt to articulate their particular, regional claims in relation to that of the larger society (Morris 1993b). In a sense, they 'themed' their needs, standardised and stylised them, in order to make them dramatically

distinctive and powerfully coherent. However, the rearticulation of such methods in the theming of mall space is profit-driven, detractors argue, and hence not remotely progressive. In the theming of shopping spaces, for instance, the attempt is “to produce images of class, ethnic, age and gender *differentiation* in particular centres”. But is this primarily “because a Vietnamized centre, for example, would better ‘express’ the target culture and better serve Vietnamese” or “because the display of difference” which such theming represents is likely to “increase a centre’s tourist appeal to everyone else from elsewhere” (Morris 1993b:304)? For her part, Morris seems to be sceptical about theming as the negotiation of expedient difference, even while allowing that the visitors to a themed environment, in taking pleasure in a consciously announced cultural ploy, are not likely to be dupes of its themed space.

Pessimistic assessments of theming abound. Even the response which allows human beings a greater intellectual-emotional repertoire than the merely moronic tends to read like lament. A good example of the latter is that of Dean MacCannell, a critic known in cultural studies for his theories of the tourist and a new leisure class. He locates theming as a form of sociocultural (mal)adjustment, referring to the plight of the fragmented, depthless postmodern consciousness. As MacCannell sees it, this ‘lost’ consciousness turns to theming in its constant struggle to give the illusion of “a subjective interior, a certain subjective intensity, perhaps a history of its own of which it can be proud” (1992:112). However, in “its very drive to represent itself as community in the symbolic sense”, he argues, a move which constitutes a desperate attempt to harness the power of ‘tradition’, the postmodern consciousness

all the more perfectly becomes nameless and placeless. As the postmodern mind becomes disconnected from everything that it pretends to value, it engages in frenzied thematization. Everything is thematized: restaurants have themes, neighborhoods have themes, streets are named after trees in alphabetical series..., everything. (1992:112)

Here, ‘theming’ is viewed as a structuring device of contemporary urban life that far exceeds the empirically visual and physically tactile. It is conceptual, semantic, psychic, a prevalent cultural logic in which all things have – *are* – ‘themes’. This is a possessive which imputes to the inanimate space a curiously coherent, motivating ‘personality’ which, when related to other such spaces, generates a sense of tentative collectivity: a ‘community’. For MacCannell, this is manufactured social identity as substitute for what is really lacking. Implicitly, MacCannell equates theming with a postmodern people’s manically intensified impulse to consume, and to domesticate extravagant consumption as the commonplace norm. Explicitly, he attributes such consumption to their felt loss of secure subjectivity.

I’m happy to grant some truth to his hypothesis. Which of us has not on occasion longed for that which presents itself to both heart and mind as a ‘lost’ way of life, whether ‘actual’, or shaped through the fabrications of the media; whether reconfigured in memory as the village or the tribe or the community. Such nostalgic impulses move even the academic who longs to salvage a degraded black South African identity by valorising forms of ‘premodern’, ‘original’ oral culture. How many of us, too – with the requisite ironic distance – have consumed ‘imagos’ of this cultural loss in the stylised landscapes of theme park reconstructions, movie sets, fictional settings and even intellectual paradigms premised on authenticity and on ‘roots’? Clearly, MacCannell is not wrong. But his critique does not paint an altogether persuasive picture of consumption, consumers, or the curious interrelations with perceived reality that they may effect in the productive processes of consuming ‘theme’. As my own work on *The Lost City* should illustrate, theme may be at once loss and longing; dross and salvage; palliative and panegyric; both felt satisfaction and the (un)willingly deferred moment of bliss.

Kitsch and Cultural Name-calling

When linked to the nostalgic and sentimental attempt to manage identity, theming, for some, is considered a resolute form of kitsch. Indeed, as will be understood by any of us who have mordantly remarked on the plastic ‘stained glass’, ‘buffalo horns’ and ‘Indian’ headdresses which form the decor of the local Spur, it is assessments of theming as banality and standardisation, of vulgar philistinism, that predominate. The themed environment of The Lost City, for instance, might be understood to exemplify a kitsch kulture that is exacerbated by the prolifically purposeful, commodified agglomeration of images and ideas around the resort. How are we to tease this out, given that kitsch is “among the strongest words of obloquy in today’s critical lexicon” (Calinescu 1986:221)? Kitsch is (commonly) thought of as a compendium of ‘bourgeois’ tastes, associated with low-brow pleasures and sentimental bibelots; it is generally used to denounce the aesthetic inadequacy of an object, especially something that is perceived to be ‘in bad taste’ on account of elaborate, inessential ornament prevailing over more utilitarian purpose. The word *kitsch* comes from the German *kitschen*, ‘to put together sloppily’ but it is significant that even the well-made commodity may be dismissed as kitsch monstrosity if its components are eclectically and excessively ornate. My own discussion of kitsch in the context of a single Chapter of The Lost City must necessarily be limited. Yet it is useful to return to Matei Calinescu’s groundbreaking research into the term (1986 and 1987), in which kitsch is shown to be closely linked with intellectuals’ scepticism – their “paranoid certainties and irrefutable arguments” – about pleasure (1986:222). For many theorists, kitsch is variously demeaned through responses that range from the grim to the patronisingly positive: it is the desacralised equivalent of a religious opiate, where real art has been banalised through a ‘progressive’ bourgeois commercialisation (1986:223). Or, if it is not quite ‘demonic’, the corrupted and corruptible hedonism of kitsch is considered the absolute antinomy of an ascetic attitude that might lead one to the recognition of the aesthetically authentic, and it is thus a form, albeit a sweet, soft form, of commodified totalitarianism....The perspective is clear enough, and it is a view in which The Lost City would be lambasted for hyperbolic architectural and superfluous stylistic quotation, for a gargantuan dedication to sensory satisfaction, indeed for a theming which, while purporting to confer unity of form and experience, voluptuously spills beyond acceptable aesthetic parameters. (One of the tautologies of using a derisive vocabulary of kitsch, you may have noticed, is that a commodity may be considered lacking both because it is overly standardised *and* because it is overly haphazard. Perhaps the operative expression, here, is ‘*overly*’, with its associations of over-the-top?)

In relation to these accounts, Calinescu places a third theory of kitsch which treats the “phenomenon of bad taste in serenely functional terms” (1986:225). The theoretical model, here, derives from Umberto Eco, and his belief that if kitsch is a form of aesthetic lie, this is indissociable from the functioning of any semiotic system where one thing – itself – is assumed to be able to stand for another – something else. Within the frame of such symbolically-laden substitution, styles and portions of individually-authored messages may be ‘cited’, taken out of their ‘natural’ contexts and situated in others. This possibility, as Calinescu observes, “accounts for kitsch, which quotes a culturally prestigious message which generally signifies the classic, say, or the traditional, or Art, in a context designed for immediate aesthetic consumption” and which “does not have the same characteristics of homogeneity, complexity and necessity of the original context” (1986:225). This vocabulary does not completely do away with the ‘problem’ of kitsch: it continues, for instance, to hint at value-laden distinctions between the category of mass culture and that of kitsch. Yet (happily, for those of us whose budget does not stretch much beyond a Spur steakhouse style) it does refuse to correlate kitsch with sinister connotations of a

diabolical conspiracy theory intended to intoxicate the plebs into submission (the radical view, as Calinescu remarks), *and* pessimistic projections of the pervasive decay of Western Civilisation (the conservative view). An understanding of kitsch as a form of semiotically deceptive behaviour fundamental to the symbolic organisation of a culture at least works to relativise and to render normal kitsch as an aesthetic mode. Instead of being apocalyptically construed, kitsch becomes a structural and substantive component, a legitimate theme, if you like, in the experience of modern consumer culture. As David Harvey might observe: The Lost City's 'tasteless' architectural eclecticism and spurious theming, indeed the resort's very existence as an excrescence of multinational mega-capital, might be responded to as typifying the postmodernist impulse and artefact: "playful, self-ironizing and even schizoid;...impudently embracing the language of commerce and the commodity. Its stance towards cultural tradition...one of irreverent pastiche, and its contrived depthlessness" undermining "all metaphysical solemnities" (Harvey 1989:7-8).

The last-mentioned view of kitsch also makes space for people's conscious agency. For theming assumes an audience that recognises and sometimes enjoys (even if it cannot 'theorise') a playful investment in dreams, fears and ideals; in hyperbole and fakery; in the big one and the one that got away. This takes us back to my earlier points about the nature of myth in a culture which is overtly premised on a playing with images, identities, stereotypes: as Morris reminds herself in researching the symbolically dense meaning of 'the mall', it is not enough for a researcher of contemporary commodification merely to seek to 'demythologise' the ideologies that are involved in theming, since "commercial culture today proclaims and advertises, rather than 'naturalizes', its powers of artifice, myth invention, simulation" (Morris 1993b:306). In this sense, The Lost City entails a *noticeably* Neverland naming of Africa. This fabulous design signature is evident especially in the built environment of the resort and in its interior decor, but also in the visual languages through which The Lost City has been advertised on television and in print media. The themed 'African-archaeological' signature mobilises many pop-signifiers of 'Africa', working with what I am inclined to call a declaratively mythic cultural currency: while the images and their connotations are unlikely to be coherently and systematically articulated by any group, they nevertheless form part of the deep-structures (or the cultural shorthand) through which ideas about Africa are habitually imagined: zebra, leopard and giraffe skin, wildlife, vast natural resources, landscapes of immense scale, 'jungle' vegetation, raging torrents, and so on, are all fashioned in The Lost City into oxymorons such as 'sophisticated primitivity', 'seriously decorative' and 'South African-Pan-Africanicity'. However invented this discursive repertoire, by many people's definition this set – or aspects of it – would probably count as comprising a credibly incredible 'Africanicity'. The fantastic quality should thus not be cited by critics as necessarily attesting to the resort's aesthetic lack. The themed monumentality of The Lost City displays 'Africa' as scopic feast and exploits the eutopic promises of tourism, adventure, and romance, while gesturing towards a past and a future in which 'Africa' is writ large on the map of the collective unconscious. It is hardly surprising that The Lost City intersects with an existing symbolic and mythic repertoire which paradoxically signifies 'Africa' as well as a place of fantastic, adventurous projection: for Africa has always constituted an ambiguous cartography within the visions of Western history: witness Pliny's often-quoted, "Ex Africa aliquid semper novi," and the equally fantastical sweep of CNN International's weather forecast: "Well, there's nothing much happening over Africa today". 'Africa' has repeatedly been configured as at once overflowing and empty, each signifier curiously able to be harnessed to the imagining of the location as ever-rich with promise.

However thorough or apparently persuasive the ideological opprobrium meted out to The Lost City, then, I am inclined to argue for its incompleteness, since 'ideology' has both political and more elusive imaginative contours; manifest official, political, economic and strategic dimensions, as well as latent, less formal resonance as popular psychology. Something of the need to grant ideology at least a dual trajectory in the theorising of commodified leisure is evident in Bennett's essay (already cited in Chapter 3) on the popular seaside resort of Blackpool. As is frequently the case in the criticism to which I deliberately turn in my Thesis, Bennett's paper is characterised by an ambivalence towards commodified pleasure. He attempts to manage pleasure in the service of an analysis that emphasises political-economy, but gradually struggles to acknowledge the inadequacy of such an insistently ideological project. For much of the paper, Bennett discusses a welter of interrelated instances in which the leisure facilities of Blackpool are undeniably political: they are associated with the enclosure of previously open space; they entail a streamlining and standardising of entertainment and employment; they are aligned with the aggrandising imperatives of a town council obeisant to a capitalist order...Bennett's examples are manifold, and they are cogently articulated, rather than expressed in the flippant tone which my own sequencing might imply. But in moving to conclude his paper, Bennett acknowledges that

if, as I have argued, the ideological coding of pleasure at Blackpool has certain textual properties, then, just as the case with the relations between any text and its readers, so 'the text of pleasure' prevailing at Blackpool does not itself automatically produce or guarantee the way it will be responded to or negotiated by the pleasure-seeker....Instead, the visitor is able to deploy a wide range of cultural resources in constructing his or her pleasure-route....[S]uch an orientation to popular entertainments...is preferable to one which opposes such practices in the name of some higher, abstracted ideal. (1986:151-152)

No doubt my ellipses in this long quotation are crafty: through them, I edit out what I consider to be Bennett's residual political correctness.⁶ He seems most willing to allow the ambiguity of sites of popular pleasure when the activities in which he witnesses people engage are at least tangentially political: "street sellers...offering dartboards printed over with a full-face picture of Margaret Thatcher" (1986:152). I am uncomfortable with Bennett's reserving most praise for the overtly resistant political agenda. It is an *oppositional* agency that remains covert in his critical narrative even as he claims to be allowing the elusively carnivalesque nature of much popular pleasure. Still, Bennett's twofold argument is useful in the context of my work on The Lost City. The fact that he finds himself towards the end of his paper needing to make the place-form and space of Blackpool meaningful in ways more creative than the explicitly ideological encourages me to take more complex account of The Lost City than an emphasis on the resort's complicity with apartheid-capitalism can convey.⁷ For instance, if I may return momentarily to Bophuthatswana: without naively refusing the structural poverty engineered by the internally imperialistic South Africa for the homelands generally, it is feasible to remind ourselves that this region was in some ways from the outset a 'treasured location' available for mythologising through tropes of discovery and riches. Bophuthatswana was distinguished amongst bantustans by a declarative wealth: it holds approximately one-third of the world's platinum and chromium deposits, as well as significant amounts of other scarce minerals, such as vanadium. (It is worth remarking in passing that geologically, much of Bophuthatswana had formed under volcanic activity, and that this fact was also mobilised in locating the area within a tourist imagination.) Of all the homelands it was Bophuthatswana, simultaneously proximate to the Pilanesberg 'African wilderness' and the 'City of Gold' of Johannesburg and to other major cities in the north of South Africa, that became the focus of the most spectacular tourist infrastructure, with equally spectacular tax incentives for the South African hotel chains involved. Tourism was one of Bophuthatswana's main sources of revenue, and this entailed the popularisation of precisely those

discourses of pleasure which we are chastened by responsible critics to regard with constant suspicion.

The Lost City: Launch, Legend and Histories

The Lost City was launched through a dramatic, multi-media marketing exercise in which The Lost City was itself a medium of its own dissemination. (Those officially invited to the opening function were treated to simulated volcanic eruptions and to the less disciplined pyrotechnics which occurred when a hill adjacent to the staged display caught fire.) Within the South African media, representations of The Lost City were prolific, and featured soaring, vaguely north African domed towers, wildlife images and statuary, 'weathered' ochre walls, and luxuriously appointed ethnic interiors. The look was "neither Luxor nor Marrakesh nor Kalahari game lodge, but something of each, only more so" (Milne 1992:7). This cultural curiosity, in which South Africans could at once recognise themselves and experience a thrill of unfamiliarity, was further popularised through depictions of the resort's 'unique' wave pool and beach, swimming pools resembling thermal baths and oases, and extensive landscaped gardens. Then there were features on the building, design and landscaping process, the entrepreneur behind the project, and the pleasurable plenitude waiting to be discovered by the visitor. Unlike the mythic lost cities to which its design envelope alluded, The Lost City was emphatically found, repeatedly located, and people were challenged to 'come and see' for themselves.

For some, the launch media-event may have been a protracted version of the "shallow, ockerish, noisome bouquet of snippet journalism" that Morris (1993a) suggests was many Australians' response to *Australia Live*, a televised national panorama devised to celebrate the Australian Bicentenary in 1988. In a paper dedicated to Cecil B. DeMille, Morris remarks that the panorama "was a four-hour tourist brochure for international, including Australian, consumption. It celebrated Australia as a vast reservoir of exotic yet familiar (cross-culturally accessible) resorts and locations" (1993a:21). Yet whatever one's personal opinion of the hyperbole unleashed for The Lost City launch season – and it is pertinent to recall, here, Daniel Boorstin's "original and perjorative use of the term *media event* to refer to an essentially bogus promotional political or economic activity" (Real 1989:40) – the fact is that the themed environment was spectacularly made present, unearthed again and again in the sensational photography (and fabulous facticity) of flyers, inserts, magazine and newspaper advertising supplements, interviews, television documentaries, and advertorials. The TV1 breakfast show *Good Morning South Africa*, for example, crossed live to The Lost City every day from November 30 to December 5, covering in 'reality bites' the behind-the-scenes build-up to the official opening. Certainly, if my references to media representations of The Lost City are illustrative rather than exhaustive, the launch campaign mounted by Sun International for the opening of The Lost City entailed national and "international media coverage on a scale unprecedented for a southern African tourist destination" (Barritt 1993:60). Ongoing discovery was also sustained through a series of high-profile media events such as the Million Dollar Golf Classic on a Sun City course designed by Gary Player (part of a golfing facility that boasts a club house modelled after Great Zimbabwe), and the Miss World Extravaganza featuring an 'exotic' African stage set and styling by Bill Faure of *Shaka Zulu* fame. Especially dramatic visibility was claimed through an opening event televised live by the South African Broadcasting Corporation: a night-time 'African Extravaganza' laser show in which Jean Michel Jarre projected an 'African' phantasmagoria onto the facade of The Palace, the hillside and the sky. Images included leopard skin and Ndebele patterns, as well as tribal skirmishes through which the ancient 'history' of The Lost City's 'people' was conjured.

We might well smirk at the ideological implications of this visual bonanza; but bear in mind, however, that cognate forms of laser display are widely used in the marketing of a number of ancient 'heritage' archaeological sites in Egypt and Morocco, where it seems to be assumed that the authentic site requires spectacularisation both if it is to be of interest to the modern, media-literate tourist and if history is to work in the service of national pageantry. Further, analogous *figurative* projections may be discerned in historical-archaeological accounts of sites such as Great Zimbabwe. According to archaeologist Martin Hall, for example, Richard Nicklin Hall, journalist, antiquarian and curator of Great Zimbabwe at the turn of the century, engaged in the following "interpretive speculations" in his account of work undertaken at this great ruined city from 1902 to 1904. "Amidst such surroundings," Nicklin Hall wrote

a score of ancient scenes are pictured in one's mind – the approaching priests with processual chant emerging through the north entrance from the Sacred Enclosure, the salutation to the emblems of the gods, the light of altar fire and torch reflected upon the walls and upon the sacred golden fillets bound round the brows of the priests, the incense-laden air, the subdued murmurings of the waiting crowd of worshippers, the invocation of the deity by priests who stand upon the high raised platform in front of the conical tower, the mystic rites, dark enchantments, and pious orgies. (Quoted in M. Hall 1995:190)

At the launch of The Lost City, such imaginative fantasies of a sensual, mysterious 'African' identity were made material through a pageant of performing primitives: working in conjunction with the laser circus that orchestrated a visual feast of 'African' pattern, were 240 black dancers clothed in imaginative interpretation of 'traditional' tribal dress. They streamed down the hills and staircases of The Lost City resort-environment carrying aloft flaming brands. These figures represented members of the lost tribe, of whose civilisation The Lost City had once been part. They were

a people from the north of Africa who journeyed southwards to seek a new world of peace and plenty. Eventually they settled in a green valley surrounded by ancient hills. But when an earthquake destroyed their magnificent architecture, they were forced to abandon it to the concealing growth of time. So The Lost City and its beautiful Palace lived on only in memory until 'rediscovered' at Sun City. (Nu-Maps cc "Bird's Eye View of The Lost City at Sun City")

Or so ran the legend. Forms of The Lost City legend are easy to find. They have appeared on the reverse of picture-postcards distributed free to residents of The Palace hotel, in tourist brochures, in magazine advertising for the resort, in independently-produced maps, in popular reportage, and even within the meta-context of academic inquiry (Hall 1994 and 1995 and Murray 1996). The narrativising legend used to disseminate an imagined historicity for The Lost City in its advertising is essentially a myth of origin which invokes and embellishes several familiar tropes. As Martin Hall explains, the legend has three stages: a Lost Age of balanced harmony, plenty and paradise; a Golden Age of palatial-built civilisation; and an Age of Dark Disaster which relegates The City to the 'timeless', 'lost' zone of Enchanted Ruin, where the apparently premodern desires European intervention and entry into History proper (1995:2).

Let us look more closely at the material of the legend. In the spirit of a Thesis that argues for the diffusion of contemporary cultural signification, I offer a convenient pastiche from several sources. Sentences 1 and 2 are from a postcard; 3, 4 and 5 from a brochure; 6, 7 and 8 from a 1992 advertisement in the *Sunday Times Business Times*. The legend reads something like this:

Centuries ago...they fled the barbarians of the Northern Deserts, wandering south until they found it...a splendid valley. This gentle tribe, blessed with prosperity, built a fabulous city cradling a magnificent palace in tribute to their royal family. [Then] one day the winds screamed, the sky blackened and the jungle took on a dark and menacing look. The earth beneath the beautiful city began to shake with thunderous power. A mighty force destroyed the walls and hurled buildings as if they were pebbles tossed from the hands of an angry giant. [Since then] the legend of this palace and its Lost City has echoed in the souls of adventurers for centuries. Finally rediscovered, the legacy of its splendour has

been restored. Today, The Palace reigns unparalleled in hotel excellence...The Most Extraordinary Hotel in the World.

As Martin Hall's work on The Lost City illustrates, given the privileged positioning of The Palace in the mythologising of The Lost City, the expression a 'lost city' cannot be considered an ideologically innocent figure of speech: its currency tends to be the correlative of imperialist imaginings and the actual conquest and colonisation of so-called new worlds (1994 and 1995). He cites, for instance, Mandeville's description of Prester John's palace, which enjoyed wide circulation in Europe and hinted at an ideal and fabulous land awaiting the explorer who persevered beyond the barbaric heart of the African darkness. Let me give but a part of the one-page description, in which the

palace is so wealthy, so noble, so full of delights that it is a marvel to tell of. For on top of the main tower are two balls of gold, in each of which are two great fair carbuncles, which shine very brightly in the night. The chief gates on the palace are of precious stones....The windows of the hall and the chambers are of crystal. All the tables they eat off are emeralds, amethysts and, some, of gold, set with precious stones....(Hall 1995:183)

In this palace, every fixture – the account goes on to describe pedestals, steps, throne, pillars, bedframe... – is fashioned from or embellished with rare substances. Clearly, this might be read in relation to descriptions of The Palace of The Lost City, which an anonymous journalist for South African *Cosmopolitan* glosses as a location where "sunlight streams in through...vast arches and shimmers on hand-laid marble floors and walls studded with semiprecious stones", where "handcrafted cut-crystal, marble and brass balustrades...line the grand staircase" (*Cosmopolitan* Journalist 1992:179). (See Figure 5.vi.) In his discussion of The Lost City, Martin Hall gives many examples besides the one drawn from Mandeville, all of which help to connote for the contemporary reader the enduring appeal of legends of lost cities. He refers to travellers' fantasies about Africa, and connects traditional legends of the lost worlds of the Queen of Sheba to the legend of the kingdom of Prester John. He also goes on to suggest that such fantasies for the first time acquire geographical-historical specificity with the discovery of Great Zimbabwe. Hall's research, in which he argues that the Legend of The Lost City "is a master narrative that structures a cultural politics of Africa" (1995:181), elucidates these aspects of The Lost City's lineage in copious detail. Given that the overall gist of my Chapter is to release The Lost City from what some claim is its *direct* descent from ancient fascinations with fantastical 'lost cities', I do not intend, here, to map the more obvious connections with an intellectual exhaustiveness.

Closely related to the status accorded to the built structure of The Palace, is the wider figure of an ancient lost civilisation that was repeatedly conjured by Sun International's marketing professionals in publicising The Lost City. As *Weekly Mail* journalist Mark Gevisser explains, since

the earth-sodding ceremony in October 1989, Kerzner's media people have been selling the Valley of the Ancients by constructing a coherent and intricately conceived 'legend', talking about The Lost City as if it really were a rediscovered Xanadu and not the fantastical creation of Kerzner and his architects.(1992:6)

Gevisser is smart to the public relations ploy, conscious of a protracted and detailed kind of cultural storytelling that is being engaged in at the level of corporate strategising. He recognises that the narrativising in some sense derives coherence from the legendary device, and that it is also intricate. Yet despite our recollection that intricacy and coherence are two of the evaluative categories conventionally invoked to distinguish the good from the bad in literary writing, Gevisser is not on these grounds about to give The Lost City the stamp of cultural authenticity or even distinction. Perhaps this is because it exploits the tensions between actual archaeological discovery and extraordinary invention, between fact and fiction, reality and imagination; between

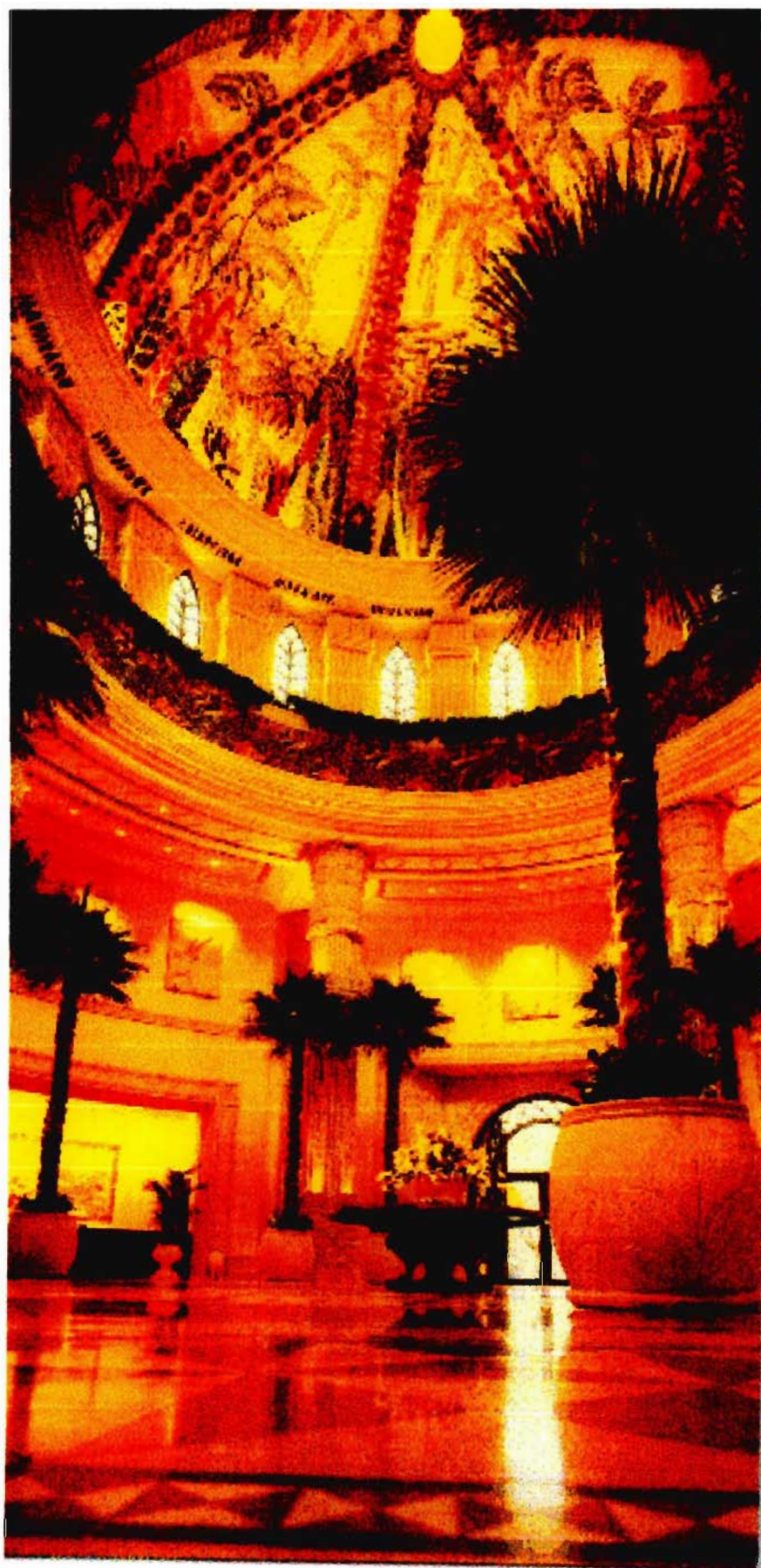


Figure 5.vi

politically correct and iconoclastic? These are some of the tensions I work with in evaluating The Lost City in this Chapter.

It hardly needs saying that the poetics of heroics used to situate the resort in the public imagination sits awkwardly with history and truth. In particular, with The Lost City being launched in the early 1990s, the legend of a lost southern African civilisation might well be thought to intersect abrasively with the 'postcolonial', 'independent' identities imagined for a 'New South Africa'. As a trailblazer for the launch of The Lost City, the legend was widely circulated over a period of approximately three years. Yet instead of inuring people to the resort and to Kerzner as crucial agent in its development – we are all familiar with irksomely repetitive advertising – the legend seems to have succeeded in harnessing public interest in what was reputed to be the restoration of a major southern African archaeological site. By mobilising a legend of a magnificently wealthy ancient civilisation discovered by Sun International chair Sol Kerzner, Sun International sought to generate for The Lost City an alluring, *narrativised* resort identity which capitalised on people's fascination with legend, stories of lost civilisations and spectacular discovery. (For now, let me remain with the legend of Kerzner's Lost City, delaying a discussion of its diffuse intertextuality with myths of lost cities that had long been in circulation.) The narrative of a recently discovered ancient lost city intersected well with the themed 'African antiquity' of the resort complex, and was bolstered by a sub-plot in which Kerzner's role in The Lost City was playfully imputed to be that of archaeological expert responsible for 'discovering' and 'restoring' the monuments of The Lost City to their original splendour. The Palace Hotel, The Royal Baths, The Royal Arena, Bridge of Time, Kong Gates, Hall of Treasures, Lost Village, Adventure Mountain, The Gold Mine, Temple of Courage, The Diamond Mine, Roaring Lagoon, The Place of Adornment, Monkey Spring Plaza...Kerzner occupied the place of definite article in each of these locations. In the press releases intended to heighten public interest in the project, not only was Kerzner touted as the visionary originator of 'the lost city' concept, and as the project's mega-financier, these more utilitarian roles were elaborated in relation to the figure of the manly archaeologist that had already enjoyed popular currency in Hollywood films.

Before I analyse the legend, it is necessary to comment on the use of narrative as an advertising device for situating product name and identity. Unlike single advertisements, or even the serial campaign, narrativising in conjunction with theme entails the production of what is intended to be a potently suggestive chain of signifiers through which it is hoped that members of an audience – potential consumers of the plot under construction – will envisage themselves as participant 'consumer characters' in a commodity community. In a sense, a narrative advertisement makes manifest a usually invisible aspect of advertising: the so-called 'storyboard'. If the storyboard is always a form of implicit professional technology used by advertisers to plot and frame the creating and producing of an advertisement, in a legend like that devised for The Lost City the storyboard is explicitly materialised as a story-like method which, working in conjunction with themed architecture, enables the ad to be located in consumers' imaginations.

Let's dwell a little, now, on the narrativising strategy which underpins the legend, and Kerzner's role in it. What should become evident is the *active* role of the reader in shaping even the meanings of the apparently already-written storyboard. In this section of the Chapter, I deliberately shift amongst divergent readings of the strategy, building up an analysis which gives substantial space to the dystopian response, even while it is this with which I wish to take issue. Overall, I hope to illustrate that the narrative force informing the legend of The Lost City lies beyond the power of any single authority, and is far more uneven than is acknowledged by those who emphasise The Lost City's capitalist co-optation. As in the case of previous Chapters, I

interpret this to mean that The Lost City is amenable to readings beyond the dogmatically ideological.

A fundamentally dystopian critique of the legend of The Lost City is unlikely to be persuaded by arguments concerning the imaginative narrativity and complexity of the legend, preferring instead to uncover in its stereotyped figurations only moral-political compromise and the vested interests of super capitalists. Let me speculate for a while about the forms which such a deeply sceptical reading might take. What should become apparent is that while critique *does* help to explain the legend, its logic is partial rather than conclusive, inviting from the intellectual interested in the *producerly* aspect of consumer culture a less cynical response.

Curiously, in the versions of The Lost City legend which are to be discovered in the media, the Sun International advertisers tactically displace 'original' authorship of and agency for The Lost City. They attribute the primary civilisation not to 'Kerzner' or the forces that 'Kerzner' represents, but to a 'gentle' people who laboured to erect these vast and beautiful buildings for their king. Through the symbolic power invested in the notion of monarchy and royalty, this ancient tribe is by implication construed as emotionally and socially cultured. They are 'a people' familiar to 'us' in their sanctioning of a monarchic, even meritocratic rule such has often been the traditional form of governance in many highly civilised Western nations. Far from being barbaric and/or militaristic southern African savages, or even central African cannibals of the sort that late Victorian discourses of Africa helped to popularise in Europe, we are to understand that The Lost City's lost tribe was (comfortingly) civilised. The tribe originated in the 'north' and had long traditions of spectacular building skills and memories of civilised life in architecturally significant cities. (The Lost City's detractor would point out, here, that this makes The Lost City, despite its southern African location, susceptible to analysis as yet another instance of a colonial conceptual scheme along the lines of archaeological and novelistic discourses which attributed Great Zimbabwe to a 'northern' African – Phoenician-cum-Egyptian – origin. Complex built structures, we recall, were understood to be anything but evidence of the capacities of local, Bantu tribes, who as we know lived in mud huts, rickety grass hovels and the like, the temporary structures of a rudimentary human concourse.)

In the Sun International legend, the civilisation of The Lost City's lost tribe is beyond dispute: the people came from the north in search of "a new world of peace". Their peaceable nature is embodied in their very architectural edifices, to which they clearly devoted time against the claims of warlike raids. It is not inconsequential that the lost tribe selected a palace as their cultural monument of choice: within the world view promulgated by the legend, The Palace is the natural manifestation of civility and gentility. In viewing the 'ruins' from the vantage point of the present, of course, we are able to discern not so much primitivity, but a universalised quotient of aesthetic excellence. Ideas such as these are embedded in the legendary civilisation which is the subject of the legend of The Lost City. Indeed Anne McClintock argues, following what Terence Ranger has theorised as "the invented tradition of the 'Imperial Monarchy'" (Ranger 1983:212), that the projection onto African people of the apparatuses of the monarchy "was a symptomatic replica of the neo-traditions of monarchical inauguration which inventive colonials were enacting all over British Africa". As she continues, the "colonists, lacking a single, centralised body of legitimating ritual, presented to Africans a dramatic effigy of tinsel and velvet royalty which bore little resemblance to the political reality of the British monarchy – by that time shrunk to a ceremonial figurehead". Yet in "the African colonies, however, the withered figure of the monarch rose to its feet and walked abroad again. The anachronistic ideology of the imperial monarchy became a widespread administrative cult, full of invention and pretence" (1990:109).⁸

You might also have noticed, in reading the legend, the fortuity surrounding the acquisition of wealth and the means by which civilisations are perpetuated or terminated. Consider displacements of the following sort. The tribe is simply “blessed with prosperity”, the implication being that it is inherently deserving, and that the wealth is not derived from brutal material labour or from unjust accumulation by elite individuals. ‘They’, *all* of them, simply enjoy their rightful, predestined benefits and social positionings. Well might you balk at this mythologisation, given the vigour with which claims of privileged, god-ordained selection were used to legitimate other invented national narratives – sociopolitical orders like apartheid being prominent among them. In the legend, the world external to the boundaries of the tribal society is similarly mythologised: the destruction of the golden age, for instance, occurs not through avaricious colonial conquest, but through an anthropomorphised nature. Just as wealth naturally comes its way so, in the natural cycle of time, in the inevitable rise and fall of nation-types, the tribe is subject to the inconstancies of weather and geographic change. Much like the now-extinct dinosaurs, you understand. And you could not but have noticed the ways in which Kerzner is ambiguously both absent and present in the narrative through figurative labour: he is presently a ‘king’ of hotel entrepreneurs analogous to the monarch who originally inspired the building of what became a lost civilisation, and is ‘therefore’ worthy of obeisance. The legend circulates the paradoxical implications that Kerzner restored the once lost ancient city to *its* former glory, *and* that the restoration simultaneously stands as testimony to *his* own greatness. Within the context of a negative critical assessment of The Lost City, even when Kerzner is absent from a particular instance of the advertising and promotion material – when he is purposely *not* named or cited in the publicity, his presence occluded so as to ‘democratise’ the creation of the resort – his overall visibility in the South African media as Maker of The Lost City is thought to guarantee that it is his name, as metonym for Capital, that will come to mind as the ‘author’ of the resort’s extravagant, even amoral meanings. Kerzner, in other words, is inevitably the ominous agent of Ideology’s invisible power.

Thus it is not difficult for a critic who is so inclined to dismember the legend of the Lost City as a rampantly capitalist version of an ‘Elizabethan World Picture’ in which meritocracy, repressive social stratification and hegemonic control over knowledge, power and access are naturalised as happy ideal – or, at any rate, in which significant agency, fame and status are naturally reserved for the deserving few. Within such a negative critical framework, the ideology embedded in the legendary ‘history’ of The Lost City would probably be construed as a conservatism inappropriate in the contested contexts of an emerging democracy. At much the same time as the legend of The Lost City was being repeatedly circulated in the South African media, remember, Sun International was being challenged over retrenchments by catering staff who were members of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). Certain members of the ANC leadership, too, were unhappy about The Lost City’s playing host to the Miss World Pageant, accusing Lucas Mangope of using the event to secure international legitimation for his position as premier.

None of this is permitted into the romanticised consensus narrative of the legend. The framework of the legendary narrative, it could be said, projects onto contemporary black South African identity a desired malleability and idealisation. The implication seems to be that unlike the ‘unruly black subjects’ of a South Africa in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the imagined subjects who constitute the “gentle tribe” need never be envisaged as citizens. They can safely remain myth-ciphers who exist only within the space of the advertising campaign. Unlike the COSATU members who voiced increasingly vociferous criticism of Sun International’s labour relations policies in the 1990s, the loyal subjects of the legend’s ancient monarch are not of the sort likely to make any claims on Sun International, Kerzner, or those South Africans still

cathected to an old social order. As in popular children's fiction based on African folktale, then, myth and legend in the Lost City narrative could be said to permit Africans into a contemporaneity only through the romanticised tribal identities which render them fundamentally outside the very socioeconomic modernity to which their labour has been so central. It is figurations like these to which the critic who foregrounds the ideological complicity of The Lost City with racist-capitalist structures is likely to object.

S/he would argue that the legend is very obviously based on tropes cherished in the adventure genre, and often crucial to the construction and colonisation of the Other at the height of Empire: pastoral primitivism, monumental 'lost' civilisations unearthed and exploited by culturally superior Western powers, the discovery and 'development' of resources, securely hierarchic social structures explicable according to Western notions of monarchy, and the 'romance' of the African noble-savage where any black heroes and heroines are princes and princesses with a gentillesse and nobility of character that derives unmediated from the aristocracy of their lineage. Myth, folktale and legend constitute familiar methodologies of colonial anthropology for representing primitive society. They purport to describe material and historical relations through what are in fact ideologically-loaded signifiers, whether encoded as pastoralism, savagery, exoticism, or timelessness. Variations on these functioned to insert Africans into colonial narratives in such a way that their realities were rendered beyond – or before – the time of modernity. The Lost City legend, then, recycles nostalgic history as explanation-cum-justification for what is simply exploitative capitalist behaviour. It romanticises monopoly capitalism through masculinist adventure tropes which are in themselves dubious.

Thus the legend, The Lost City, and Kerzner's role in their materialisation ask to be theorised in terms coined by Joan Gero and Dolores Root in their analysis of *National Geographic*. As they see it *National Geographic*, in its capacity as an armchair-travel magazine, popularises an archaeological practice which involves "exploration in remote places...the discovery of 'lost' civilizations, opulent artefacts... [and] the spectacular remains of prehistory" (1990:35), a "resource extraction and a search for treasure" (1990:26). They argue that this notion of archaeology as the romance of virile, heroic adventure and discovery naturalises "the material and social conditions of an expanding capitalist society" (1990:34), thereby justifying the myth that rugged individualism has been the dynamic behind American capitalist exploration and conquest of 'the globe'. In particular, as I later consider in some detail, the metaphor of triumphant archaeologist is circulated in the heroic adventure and discovery narratives popularised by writers like Rider Haggard in *King Solomon's Mines*, and it is not dissimilar to contemporary tropes of 'corporate adventure' in the image of the 'far-seeing' economic visionary who is able to project 'high road scenarios' for economic development. For if we are determined to prove that The Lost City project is subsumed within a dominant ideology that pivots on interanimations of race and capital, we could easily leave the remote past and extrapolate to contemporary figures of empire in the corporate world. A newspaper headline, for instance, describes The Lost City as "Africa as Steven Spielberg and Donald Trump might have imagined it". The invocation of celebrated Hollywood mega-producer and supercapitalist Donald Trump can be taken to imply that 'lost cities' are vectored into forms of contemporary empire building: they entail actual and not simply symbolic mobilisations of capital; egotistical acquisition and display and coercive monopolistic political-economies that work to the advantage of the billionaire, or at best the metropolitan Self, rather than for a broader sociocultural good. Indeed, in its frequency and emphasis, much of the media material generated around The Lost City launch fulfils a function similar to that of the hagiographic 'brag books' common in early-twentieth-century North America. These books, as often occurred in empire building of many kinds,

“depicted local history as the heroic activity of the leading men of business and industry” (Davis 1990:30). A cognate tendency is evident in the spectacularising reportage which purports to explain the development of the large metropolis. As Mike Davis says of the case of Los Angeles, monumental myths premised on heroic empire building obscure the violence of the city’s past in order to evoke the city as “conjured out of the desert as a willed act of imagination by a visionary pantheon of artists, engineers and architects” (Davis 1990:83). Without their exceptional, innovative energies we are asked to believe, presently great urban conglomerates would never have been built, and their potentials would have been lost to humankind. (There is no space, in this legendary narrativising, for the questions of Brecht’s worker who reads, and who seeks to reclaim from cultural occlusion the important histories of ordinary people who are habitually written out of the Grand Historical Story in which the protagonists are perceived to be Great Men.)

Real History vs Cultural Falsity: The Lost City and Lost Opportunities

Thus the legend of The Lost City could be said to suppress in public consciousness “the real history” of ancient settlements to be found a few kilometres away at Rustenburg (Haffajee 1992:22) and, in doing so, stereotypically to identify Africans with a nostalgic, allochronic past. In the architecture selected for The Lost City, too, a style which intentionally intersects with the legend, Wimberley Allison Tong and Goo are likely to be accused, by some, of having forfeited an opportunity to avail themselves of rich, *historically real* southern African design sources. In 1993, for example, while The Palace of The Lost City was granted an award by the Institute of South African Architects, the Institute was taken to task by architect Hannah le Roux. The Palace, she felt, could not feasibly be equated with the two township resource centres that were its co-winners in the Transvaal category. The supposedly “transcendental values” used as assessment criteria – “structural expression, detailing, suitability of purpose, material usage and...a felt sense of spatial quality, scale, proportion and balance”, she maintained, “skirted round any comment on the morality of the buildings’ functions” (1993:50). Moreover, she argued that the formalist criteria discounted the need for appropriately vernacular design referents. I am sympathetic to her qualms, being myself suspicious of a ‘purely’ formalist emphasis in the field of literary studies. Yet in this Thesis I have already shown myself to be reluctant to claim an ideologically-transparent morality for the ways in which buildings may function, and equally uncertain as to what would constitute an acceptable ‘vernacular’ idiom. However, I’m probably a small voice against a strident clamour. Martin Hall (1995), for his part, maintains that the pity of the overtly local or regional design opportunity that was lost in The Lost City development is particularly lamentable when we understand that the corporate identity of resort designers Wimberley Allison Tong and Goo is, in fact, premised on respect for “the environment and cultural heritage of each host community” (Wimberley Allison Tong & Goo 1991). They strive to realise in their designs a philosophy of cultural appropriateness (Hall 1995:197). Hall refers, here, to a corporate mission statement document entitled “Do Not Disturb”, and uses as his exemplar the “indigenous historical references” (1995:197) of the award-winning Tanjong Jara Beach Hotel, a commission undertaken by Wimberley Allison Tong and Goo for the Tourist Development Corporation of Malaysia. Hall explains that the “theme was derived from local architecture – *istanas*, wooden palaces built by earlier sultans of the east coast of Malaysia” (1995:197); in the views of the designers themselves, the structure served to “embody, perpetuate and preserve the Malay traditional heritage, and encourages others to utilise indigenous craftsmanship” (Wimberley Allison Tong & Goo 1991). The Malay venture, Hall maintains, “seems the antithesis of The Lost City project, which insists that all inspiration has to come from outside, and be subject to the

destruction of the 'dark force'" (1995:197). In searching out a more apposite design idiom for The Lost City, Hall suggests that the design architects might have considered

the possibilities for themes that are offered by the most recent interpretation of Great Zimbabwe....Thomas Huffman has mapped out a comprehensive history of the medieval Shona kingdom of which Great Zimbabwe is known to have been the capital....Huffman has argued for a direct line of continuity with modern Venda ethnography....Here, surely, is an 'essentially African' theme with immense possibilities for hotels, casinos and Hollywood special effects, all designed with sensitivity to the cultural heritage of the host community. (1995:198)

As Hall understands it, however, the historically accurate medieval African frame of reference would never have seemed viable to the architects. Why? Because this concept of an African civilisation lacks an extensive "prior inscription" (1995:198) in a cultural imaginary, and cannot compete with the bastardised, stereotypical images that constitute an ambient 'Africa'; images that are spawned by a Western cultural imperialism in the discourses of adventure fiction, the travelogue, the Hollywood blockbuster, and the like. Significantly, Hall does not embark on a diatribe against commodity culture and the ethical iniquities of middle class entertainments, gambling and 'Hollywood'. As the above quotation indicates, he in fact allows for intersections between history, archaeology and capital-intensive leisure projects such as spectacular hotels and casinos, so I cannot easily pigeonhole his position as being within a Frankfurt School 'manipulation thesis'. Yet his remarks do not give credence to the disarticulated and disjunctive negotiations through which African identities are fashioned. He qualifies his antithetical model, for instance, with 'seems', and he is rightly rather uncomfortable with his invocation of something called an "essentially African" theme. He is anxious lest he himself be thought to stereotype in the manner of the very tropes he seeks to challenge, and therefore volatilises an implicit essentialism by means of quotation marks: "an 'essentially African' theme". Against this selfconsciousness and acknowledgement of cultural relativity and construction, though, we must read the introductory certainty of "Here, surely". Also, we have to decide what to make of the fact that while Hall imagines his to be an intervention in the discourses which have given rise to the monumental Lost City, his Malaysian and Zimbabwean 'models' are themselves comparatively spectacular structures which derive from socially elite expressions of culture. I am not myself certain where this leaves us, especially when we consider that whatever its perceived lack of stylistic-cultural 'authenticity', The Lost City was imagined as a project which would entail the creative reworking of African idioms that ranged from the immediately local, to the representatively South African, to the north African. To this end, Kerzner has emphasised that the designers

took a long time to get the architecture right. First it looked too much like a mosque...[too] Moroccan....I said, 'Where's Africa? I don't see it. Do something to those domes, put elephant tusks on them or something. I want to see Africa in the design. Put animals on them. Put proteas on the pillars. Now it's right. It works. (Quoted in Burton 1992:224)

There *are* confusions in the cultural repertoires that Kerzner calls upon to legitimate the architecture and style of The Lost City, and I am not about to ignore these. Are mosques not 'African', for instance? Is Morocco not on the African continent? Is a real Africa always to be emblematised only in wildlife and flora? Also, when we speak of 'Africa', what precisely is it that we mean? The globalising label is a derivative of popular 'American-speak', in which subtle distinctions amongst vastly different regions, civilisations and cultures are unproblematically merged under the category of exotic Other. And what of Kerzner's egotistical presence in this account of The Lost City? It is perhaps almost more prominent than that of the 'Africa' to which he refers. Nevertheless, the quotation does valuably convey the hybridly diffuse and often contradictory signifiers through which any representation of African identity must be articulated.

The signifiers are unstable. They are more uncomfortably cathected into complex imaginings of postcolonial selves and Others, into desires for the lost memories of heritage and the discoveries of enterprising cultural invention, than the phrase “an ‘essentially African’ theme” would imply. If *The Lost City* is somewhat ‘lost’ in its apparent lack of an overtly local place-form, the architects have also found interestingly syncretic ways of constructing and negotiating identity on a continent which has been parted and parcelled by the paladins of Empire. Nor ought we to imagine, I suspect, that the use of a design idiom based on the stone ruins of great and lesser ‘zimbabwes’ would necessarily confer upon a tourist entertainment complex a greater (rather than lesser) cultural authenticity than a style fashioned from a continental and intercontinental haphazardry. If *The Lost City* arrogantly claims an African modernity, it also ‘pays homage’ as Kerzner and others see it, to the history of ancient settlements such as Great Zimbabwe: the clubhouse is explicitly modelled after this archaeological site, at the reputed cost of R17-million.⁹ Making evaluations even more complex, we might recall that Gerard Moerdijk ‘found’ in Great Zimbabwe an inspirational model for the Voortrekker Monument, a reified symbol of Afrikaner national identity whose foundation stone was laid in 1938. He “turned admiringly to the historic site of the Zimbabwe ruins,...absorbed with the African qualities of this magical place”, and he was impressed by the building technologies through which scale was conveyed. In his very choice of granite material, chevron-patterned cornices and diminishing stone courses, Moerdijk “paid homage” to Great Zimbabwe (Chipkin 1993:52). If nothing else, this snippet points to the difficulty one faces when trying to read off an architectural design some unmediated, intrinsic ideology.

At any rate Martin Hall, seeking to establish the authority of his own interpretation of *The Lost City*, one in which the resort is more American fantasy than African authenticity, turns from the built structure per se to the person, and considers the originator of *The Lost City* and its legendary narrative to be not South African Sol Kerzner but his agent, Gerald Allison. Oddly enough, in Hall’s paper Allison, partner in the architectural-design firm which planned *The Lost City*, is nevertheless given an ability to explain the resort in terms which, while still susceptible to criticism, are less obviously debunkable than Kerzner’s bold, often crass media statements.

Kerzner, from all accounts, approaches design-related disciplines like architecture with all the respect of a bulldozer. He moves in to planning meetings with the Big Gestures characteristic of the self-important creative consciousness, scrutinising a R30 000 scale model, then taking a butter knife with which he “defly carves the model to pieces. ‘I’m moving the mountain’, he declares. When that’s done, he takes the thick black pen and draws snaking lines across the surface. ‘This is where the rivers must go.’ It has taken him two minutes to destroy a model that took two months to perfect” (Burton 1992:223). As Hall’s paper (1995) makes clear, Allison is more subtle in his justifications of *The Lost City* as an expression of an ‘African cultural renaissance’, skillfully using a linguistic performative that approximates academic criteria of judgement.

The ‘Legend of *The Lost City*’ is based purely on fantasy, but colored by the heritage of Africa....Some of the architectural forms were influenced by the legends and stories that the ancient ones passed on from generation to generation. These stories, both true and mythological, told of their forefathers’ life in northern Africa where great cities dominated by soaring, domed spires and high arched facades were common. As we developed this ‘new architecture’, we tried very hard to recall in a mystical manner a conglomeration of historical influences. (Hall 1995:180)

This, by the way, is Hall citing Allison from what Hall announces is a “personal communication”. Reading between the lines, we understand that this piece of private correspondence between the academic archaeologist and the corporate but academically-trained architect is intended to signify – even to guarantee – Hall’s credibility. Ideologically, the readers of Hall’s paper are meant to feel

themselves taken into the writer's confidence on account of his confidential, but now public, correspondence. Far from relying only on the pop-speak of local journalism in his decoding of The Lost City, Hall is indicating his privileged access to otherwise 'lost', 'secret' information and insights which authenticate his intellectual strategy and magisterially enable him to demystify The Lost City. Searching out the truth on the resort, he goes back, as it were, to the 'source'. That's the spirit of intellectual adventure for you. (Perhaps Hall, so seriously straight in his exegesis of The Lost City, is not aware of these hidden meanings; unconscious of his own tropic tramping of the paths of popular adventure with which he is taking issue.)

What is implied is that Allison is somehow the original, or master, narrating consciousness behind the legend even though, as Hall mentions elsewhere in his paper, "Sun International's publicists seem to have left Mr Allison with little more than a walk-on role" (1995:198). For Hall, it is Allison who in effect authors the design narrative and associated legend through which The Lost City is marketed to the public. He is cast as the narrator of a myth which was "framed at the Californian corporate headquarters of Wimberley Allison Tong and Goo, international resort designers" (1995:179). Although Hall touches on the matter of narrative power only in passing, rather than giving attention to discourses of authorship and the relative status of narrative point of view in relation to authorial voice, it is not difficult to situate the comment within the negatively diagnostic thrust of Hall's overall paper. The implication is that the narrative framework of a legendary lost city, and with it the meta-narrative thematic structures of an ancient African architecture, derive from a neo-colonial, global capitalist will-to-power over what is iteratively represented as the primitive, rather than from a wish to interrelate with what is authentically, historically, locally African. (Indigenous African people, we are to understand, would quite obviously choose to represent themselves through any number of codes more imaginative and humanly accurate than figures of a lost past and hence unattainable future.) In the narrative strategy used for the marketing of The Lost City, then, the initiative and agency are those which have characterised metropolitan contacts with Africa throughout history: a powerful Self generates fantasies in which the self is variously articulated, realised, liberated, while the Other is silenced, de-realised and exploited.

However, to accede without questioning to this theoretical vector is to grant neither Hall's own detailed account in his essay of the curious permutations in which myths of lost cities have appeared in both academic and popular archaeology – an unruly collision of fact and fiction, nor the very instabilities which characterise Allison's comments, quoted above. Let me take these points in convenient order, firstly returning to Allison's comments, then elaborating on the productive disjunctures in Hall's 1995 paper which for purposes of his own argument he would rather gloss over.

In his comments, Allison invokes fantasy as well as history, and this history is at once a mild, unofficial imaginative colouring, and the potentially potent variant of heritage. Further, the very grammatical mood of Allison's account shifts uneasily: after the ellipsis it relinquishes the generic present and assumes the status of past. This is the immediate past of the resort's imaginative design history, but it is simultaneously the distant, as-if-real past of the lost tribe that has been fictionalised for the marketing of the resort. In the semantic structure of the sentence, creative embellishment sits alongside supposedly achieved fact. The style and story to which Allison refers are as it were (being) authorised by a tribe whom we know never existed yet who must be granted an existence of a sort if we are to understand Allison's argument. Allison purports to be describing something that was, rather than what is after all the invention of an advertising agency. Similarly, he and his colleagues are curiously 'in' the 'virtual' history that they are both seeking to create and to recall.

Of course, it is perfectly realistic to consider that Allison in other contexts might overtly claim an authorial status in relation to *The Lost City* – in the pages of a project report, for instance, he might grant himself a publicly declarative agency in narrating *The Lost City* in South African and international consciousnesses; he might also rhetoricise himself thus in an annual company newsletter detailing the corporate achievements of Wimberley Allison Tong and Goo. But in his correspondence with Hall, in the interests of the legendary narrative that he is attempting both to explain and to call into being, he in fact disperses agency into several locations. He underplays privileged claims of authorial-cum-narratorial knowledge, preferring to displace this in favour of a more loosely defined collective authorship which lies in the mists of ‘history’. However quick the intellectually selfconsciousness response – “Ah, but it is precisely such a mythologising of history to which the critical researcher ought to object” – it remains partly valid to admit that it is difficult to designate with ideological precision the interanimations of myth and history at work in the narrativising of *The Lost City* resort.

If *The Lost City* is narrativised through a semantic volatility that invites ideological debunking, we might also allow that Allison is consciously relating the imagined story structure that informs *The Lost City* to a narrative network in terms of which African history and a valuable African humanity has repeatedly been reconfigured in a public imagination. Orality, strong ancestral links, a worldview which encompasses at once the empirical and the mystical: these cannot be said to have predominated in only colonial-imperialist conceptualisations of Africa. Any number of black South African creative writers repeatedly attribute to a lost way of ‘black life’ the humanising potentials of face-to-face storytelling, long-memory, and the binding capacity of ‘ubuntu’ or individual situatedness within a sustaining structure of human(e) sharing. Even in the face of internecine and ethnic conflicts, this ‘lost’ way of life is called upon as if it were historical fact, a cultural heritage which, if accessed, would enable the contemporary black person to negotiate a more meaningful sense of identity.

To turn, now, to the overall nature of Hall’s 1995 article: his is the only detailed, conventionally academic research to have been done on *The Lost City*. In many respects, Hall’s work is similar to my own in that it charts the complexity of *The Lost City*’s provenance. While he discusses familiar literary and para-literary figures like Rider Haggard and Wilbur Smith (something I do later in this Chapter), and devotes a significant amount of space to a consideration of the figures through which Africa has been constructed in Western discourses, Hall’s emphasis is understandably more archaeological. (Hall is professor of Archaeology at the University of Cape Town and participant in the Historical Archaeological Research Group.) He brings to bear on *The Lost City* a detailed knowledge of both southern African archaeological sites and their professional-academic custodians. He makes one aware of just how thoroughly implicated in the discourses of archaeology a resort like *The Lost City* is, whether the complex is considered at the level of architectural structure, or of advertising story. However, what is especially interesting about Hall’s 1995 essay is the frequency with which he draws the reader’s attention to uncertainty even as his overall critical purpose is to contain this disquieting aspect of the material with which he is dealing in order to secure the position of ideology critique that underpins his argument. In charting the so-called master narrative in terms of which the legend of *The Lost City* must inevitably be considered ideologically expedient, for example, he admits that the stories of the lost city of the Queen of Sheba “are often contradictory” (1995:182) and that the Sheba who emerges from these stories “is an ambiguous figure” (1995:183). Similarly in myths of wealthy African kingdoms, Prester John is not a “tangible presence” but “a mere shadow” (1995:183). Nevertheless, Hall concludes that these “early stories, in their many and varied forms, set up the main elements of the master narrative of the Legend of the Lost City” (1995:183). While my point

is not to deny the contributions made by such enduring stories to Sun International's resort, I am also inclined to argue that their proliferation, variety and ambiguity introduce into the legend elements of ideological uncertainty; an uncertainty in which there might be place for symbolic and emotional appeal, alongside more conventional critique.

I may further this case by turning from *The Lost City* and its mythologising to Ali Mazrui's discussion of the odd intersections of history and romanticism that have gone towards the negotiating of contemporary African cultural identities. In a chapter headed "On Grandeur and Primitivism", Mazrui refers to the strategic recuperation by modern African thinkers of two divergent features of African cultures: monumental built structure and pastoralism. Given the context of my own Chapter on *The Lost City*, I am especially interested in what he terms "the theme of gloriana in African history" (1986:72). If it is true that subtle, often pastoral societies of hunter-gatherers prevailed in precolonial Africa (he gives the examples of the Khoisan, BaMbuti, Somali, Masai and Tuareg people), these so-called tribes without rulers co-existed alongside more elaborate states that valued monumental gloriana. These complex states of centralised rule, he explains

evolved into cultures of monuments, brick and mortar civilisations. At the pyramids of the Nile or the castles in Ethiopia, or at the awesome ruins of Great Zimbabwe...one is visually reminded of this monumental side of African history, the history of kingdoms and dynastic empires which also believed in using stone and brick to erect durable testimony to their life-styles. (1986:72)

As Mazrui sees it, in attempting to counter European "cultural haughtiness" contemporary cultural commentators tend to have marginalised this aspect of African history, while idealising the tradition of "romantic primitivism". As we know, African pastoralism and its imagined concomitants of simplicity, intuition, peaceful ruralism and coherent village community has been highly valued by a number of African creative-critical thinkers. Prominent among them are Leopold Senghor and Aimé Césaire, whose notion of *negritude* extols "Those who have explored neither the seas nor the skies", and who have built "neither a tower nor a cathedral". Yet the culture of gloriana has *also* been purposefully mobilised by African historians and cultural practitioners (such as Senegalese historian-scientist Cheik Anta Diop) against the massive cultural arrogance of Europeans who tended to regard with contempt what they deemed to be primitive African 'mud' civilisations. In defending itself against such prejudice, this school of African thought "romanticised gloriana"; it

emphasised that Africa before the Europeans had had its own complex civilisations of the kind that Europeans regarded as valid and important – civilisations which produced great kings, impressive empires and technological skills. This particular school of African thought looked especially to ancient Egypt as an African civilisation, and proceeded to emphasise Egypt's contribution to the cultures and innovations of ancient Greece. (Mazrui 1986:72-3)

This tactical form of cultural assertion (which is not absolutely distinct from Moerdijk's inspirational turn to Great Zimbabwe), highlights glorious moments in Africa's history and a past grandeur embodied in material monuments of extraordinary scale. It identifies aspects of African civilisations that are comparable to those complex societies, such as ancient Greece, which Europe has claimed as originary exemplars in the development of Western Civilisation. It is an approach which is "defined in part by European measurements of skills and performance", by attention paid to points of dramatic technological innovation (Mazrui 1986:73). In validating African dignity, the school of African romantic gloriana draws the attention of Europeans and Africans to the great monumental civilisations of ancient Egyptian pyramids and Ethiopian castles in the north. It looks with pride to the ancient ruins of Great Zimbabwe in the south, and "adopts the name for a newly independent country" (Mazrui 1986:72). It cites as evidence of sophisticated African civilisation the ancient empires of west Africa like Ghana and Mali, taking these names

as official designations for modern republics, and it turns to Songay in the Sahel, and Benin, Oyo and Assante nearer the coast. As Mazrui remarks, the celebration of romantic gloriana is a paradoxical form of cultural reasoning: it rejects "European 'information' about Africa (that pre-colonial Africa was decentralised and without towers and palaces)", but accepts "European values which regarded towers and palaces as the necessary symbols of civilisation" (Mazrui 1986:75-6). Equally paradoxically, it tends to be an ethos of urbanism, mass populations, trade and manufacturing, even as it is predicated upon an admiration of kings, emperors and eminent figures from the past, and "a respect for hierarchy and stratification, with its capacity to produce historical achievements" (Mazrui 1986:75). Citing the case of Ethiopia, Mazrui also points out that architectural evidence of African gloriana may be linked in complex ways to discursive and rhetorical structure. Through the discourses of myth, the origins of the imperial Ethiopian dynasty are attributed to the legendary figures of King Solomon and Makeda, the 'Queen of Sheba'. This myth of ancestry, an intermingling of legends at once African and Semitic, is tied to a mythologised sense of contemporary social mission (Mazrui 1986:298). While "the last of the Solomonic emperors in Ethiopia was overthrown in 1974, and a Marxist revolution has succeeded the dynasty, there is no doubt that the legend of Solomon and Makeda is still widely believed in the highlands of Ethiopia" (Mazrui 1986:299). If Ethiopia and Great Zimbabwe are, unlike The Lost City, *real* African locations, there is clearly at work in the cultural representation and circulation of meaningful African reality aspects of romanticism such as inform the mythologising of the Sun International resort. Thus merely cynically to attribute the legend of The Lost City to the capitalist-inflected activities of Kerzner and a firm of resort designers is greatly to oversimplify the levels of narrative that are woven into The Lost City. This attribution rather too easily refuses the diffuse repertoires through which ideas and images are circulated, and the overdetermined meanings that an appeal to an invented 'African' heritage might have. Similarly, merely to hear the word 'myth' or 'legend' and think *false* or (premodern) consciousness, is to fall foul of cultural essentialism.

Clearly, in reading The Lost City I consider myself to be dealing not so much with a master narrative as with a number of curiously familiar storylines which strike me now as old and enduring, now as remarkably new; now as original and now as reworkings of extant figures. I do not wish to occlude or deny the ways in which manifest and latent discourses of what we might loosely call 'colonial Africanism' have been complicit in perpetuating large-scale injustice, whether through the official, institutionally-sanctioned languages of law, or through more informal images and stories that circulate in mass and popular culture. Yet even apparently crude discursive constructions are informed by longings less simple to categorise. We know, for instance, that anthropologist Renato Rosaldo is highly critical of colonial interventions into 'other' cultures, but he might venture to comment that an *understandably* "elegiac mode of perception,...a mood of nostalgia" informs the legend of The Lost City. The mythic appeal of a narrativising legend such as that used to market the Lost City – a once-noble-savage tribe eliminated by natural forces – is a familiar trajectory in terms of which agents of colonialism paradoxically "*long* for the very forms of life they intentionally altered" and "*mourn* the passing of what they themselves have destroyed" (1989:68-69, my italics). Accordingly, we might grant an elusive, emotionally-charged meaning to The Lost City.

For many cultural critics, though, The Lost City and its legend are likely to be understood only diagnostically. The argument would probably insist that the constraints of an explicitly themed setting and narrative inevitably delimit the actual and ideological power of the visitor. S/he is effectively stripped of any agency, and in enjoying The Lost City is passively inserted into the consumerist design that has been prepared for the audience.

A damning intellectual precedent for an analysis of *The Lost City* is Louis Marin's critique of Disneyland as a "degenerate utopia". For Marin, the thematics of Disneyland concretely embody America's dominant system of ideas and values; they are a "representation realised in geographical space of the imaginary relationship which the dominant groups of American society maintain with their real conditions of existence or, more precisely, with the real history of the United States and with the space outside of its borders" (no date:54). The preconceived geographical-spatial arrangement of Disneyland into sections such as Mainstreet USA, Adventureland and Frontierland, he contends, forms a narrative which completely constrains the tour of the visitor. In order to make sense of her visit, in order to arrange her experience into the conceptual plot of a meaningful sequence of events, in other words, the visitor is obliged to rely on the already-ideologically encoded representations of America which circulate in the enclosed theming of the site. Even beyond the narrowly narrativised world of the theme-park, Marin implies, the world-at-large is so saturated with Disneyphania in the form of films and products and meta-locations that a visit to Disneyland is merely the conclusion of a narrative that has not only been inaugurated elsewhere, but is already firmly in place.

Like Marin, I agree that many popular themed locations derive their meaning from a proliferation of cultural forms, practices and even psychological patternings that occur beyond the immediate vicinity of the park itself. (Using Morse's paper on the chronotypical everyday of freeways, malls and television, I have argued as much in Chapter 3. The remainder of the present Chapter suggests the forms that this interdiscursivity might take in the specific case of *The Lost City*.) Yet unlike Marin, I am not willing to insist that this proliferation constitutes an always-already present that precludes the visitor from any but the most circumscribed and degenerate of pleasures. And unlike Bennett (1986) in his essay on Blackpool, moreover, I am not prepared to take issue with Marin only on the grounds that Blackpool is *not* a thoroughly narrated leisure location and hence remains outside the limitations which Marin attributes to Disneyfied pleasure.

Let me elaborate my case by returning briefly to the narrativising of 'History' in the legend of *The Lost City*. Whatever the role played by the facts of 'actual history' in constructing a critique of Kerzner and *The Lost City* – and I am thinking here of any facts from the academic disciplines of history, archaeology and anthropology which could be used to construct counter narratives to that disseminated for *The Lost City*, as well as individual life stories of people who have been involved in *The Lost City* project – many people's responses to these cultural phenomena are not necessarily shaped, in either the first, the last, or any instance, by criteria of factual, historical accuracy. As I have already said, both the resort and Kerzner could not have materialised without the peculiarities of a South African historical context from the late 1970s to the mid 1990s. As I have indicated, too, South Africa's internal colonisation of various areas in the form of homelands greatly facilitated the securing and expansion of Kerzner's gambling empire, especially with the advantageous tax spinoffs and labour contracts available to South African investors in these areas. Yet it may be a fabulated, aleatory 'history' – romance, adventure, fantasy – which signifies most prominently in the signifying of Sol and *The Lost City*. Given the legendary encoding of *The Lost City*'s storyboard, too, the appeal of the advertising is likely to be perversely self-conscious and unconscious, working both with and against an academically historicist discourse. On the one hand, for instance, the reader or viewer may explicitly *re-cognise* *The Lost City*'s advertising legend by relating it to Classical or to African legends, whether recollected from oral or literate sources. On the other, though, the language and visual signs through which the legend is encoded might themselves be taken to connote, without any apparently conscious mediation, archetypal motifs and situations, 'traces' of a human prehistory that has permutated into the phatic codes of romanticised cultural explanation. The

legend of The Lost City, similarly, may be intricately developed, but it is presented through the simplified linguistic and social patterns characteristic of legendary discourse: tribal social arrangements, a quest journey, a new world, peace and plenty, green valley, ancient hills, magnificent architecture, natural destruction...all of these are narrative motifs which tend to exert an appeal which spills beyond the expressly ideological. Such is evident, for instance, in Laurens van der Post's *The Lost World of the Kalahari* (1958), a "spellbinding adventure and spiritual quest, in search of the legendary Bushmen of southern Africa" (front cover). We may know Van der Post's history to be in many respects romanticised and even fabricated; we may sniff at his recasting of history and anthropology as adventure; we may be impatient with his guru-mystical tone. But his book is not completely to be derided. It has moments of melancholic wish-fulfilment and of blunt exaggeration that tell us not only about Van der Post, the man, but about the fantastic longings of the highly technologised society of which we ourselves are part.

Further in relation to The Lost City and history: if there are fortuitous correspondences between Kerzner's first name and the names or nicknames of historical figures like 'King Solomon' and 'the Sun King', for instance, it is commonly understood that these names function within the popular *not* primarily as historical fact but as deracinated indices of legendary meanings such as spectacular wealth and dramatically visible individual status; visionary insight and extravagant excess. The historical, here, has been taken from its context of specific time and place and reinterpreted through the less easily mapped co-ordinates of romance and fiction. What we also need to bear in mind here is that history, story, life-story are awkwardly interconnected genres in people's responses to consumer culture. A knowingness concerning the invented rather than 'real' quality of The Lost City and its legend is likely to mean that people's responses to The Lost City are not easily named as fact or fiction, truth or falsity, relevant or trivial. As I later discuss in more detail, in the journalism generated by The Lost City's launch, for instance, cynicism mixed with curiosity, and gave rise to responses which cannot definitively be labelled 'critique' or 'celebration'. As Radner (1995) argues in a different context (that of women's magazines), the logic of cultural consumption and hence of critical analysis becomes driven not by a conventionally binaristic either/or, but an uncomfortable both/and. Indeed, as I have illustrated, the legend, and Kerzner's (dis)placement in it, are susceptible to intriguing readings which struggle to allow the overdetermined nature of cultural production, reception and naming in consumer culture. The very fact that 'Kerzner' is erratically placed in and beyond the legend as originator and character should alert us to problems attendant upon insistent attempts to read either the man or the resort in terms solely of a hermeneutics of suspicion. If, within the context of the legend, now you see him, now you don't, can you authoritatively determine precisely what he signifies, and on what grounds he is culturally irrelevant?

The unusual logic of the ambivalent rather than the unitary is important, for as people try to make sense of The Lost City as a cultural phenomenon at once exceptional and familiar in feeling – signed with a distinctive signature and simultaneously analogous to phenomena from a diffuse cultural repertoire – it is probable that many associational fragments will be brought into loose correlation, rather than interpretation being positioned through a single, overtly managed advertising narrative. As the version of the legend offered in this Chapter should suggest, this very 'singularity' is insecure, since The Lost City story attempts to generate narrative and thematic coherence between disparate signifiers like primitivity and modernity. Even in a dystopian reading of the legend, you might have noticed, 'The Palace' is an ambiguous signifier. It is presented as being at once fabulous ancient monument and contemporary hotel, a structure whose authority is linked to both the tradition of deep history and the still-unrealised potentials of advanced futurity. The advertising rhetoric uneasily emplaces and displaces both a South African

corporate imperialism and a mythologised African history. The Palace hotel is represented as the most remarkable legacy of a *nobly* savage extinct civilisation (noble on account of its accumulated treasures, as well as its loyal obedience to a regent), even as it is projected as the most spectacular hotel of the late-twentieth-century world, and hence as a distinguishing feature of South Africa's international modernity. Even a so-called master narrative of colonial 'Africanism' imagined along lines analogous to those developed in detail by Said (1978) for Orientalism, cannot and does not exist in a unified and master form. This discursive archive is everywhere and yet not quite in place; similar to but also refracted into difference. As I see it, this facilitates an argument in which loose ends, lacunae, disjunctures, ambivalences and ambiguities ought to be given as much critical-intellectual weight as is generally accorded to repetition, stereotype, narrative closure, and ideological certainty.

On an academic audience committed to politically-correct versions of left or even postcolonial theory, the supposed attractions of The Lost City might well be lost. Or, to put this a little differently, the attraction might only find an intellectual handhold in a critical framework which borrows from the postmodern. (Such is evident in this Chapter: part of my pleasure lies in my being able to play out on The Lost City as cultural site a complicated web of deconstructive ambivalences.) Pleasurable recuperations of The Lost City through the recognitions of deconstruction and of Disney – which might very loosely be designated 'academic' and 'popular' responses – are in fact not dissimilar. Both are premised on degrees of bodily and cerebral play and the staging of subjectivity. Especially interesting, though, is that while both popular and academic pleasure in The Lost City work creatively with explicit acknowledgement of a fantastically simulated 'Africa' and 'wild adventure', the more traditional literary academic, even one familiar with the postmodern, seems to believe that the theming of The Lost City cites only from a line of 'trivial', 'juvenile' empire fiction which ought by necessity to be scorned. (The derision rests on the assumed formal and moral inferiority of genres such as adventure romance.) As more than one colleague has dismissed my interests on more than one occasion: "The Lost City? But *obviously* it's straight out of Haggard; *King Solomon's Mines* and all that". The Lost City complex, then, is superficial, childish, predicated on the expediently mythologised, regressive 'history' characteristic of an adventure genre which reached its apotheosis in Rider Haggard. All of this means that the resort is not worth attention or, at best, is to be subjected to high-minded intellectual debunking. (See for instance Couzens [1982b], where he recounts the scornful reception given to his paper on Haggard.) Fairly characteristic of the morally-informed caution with which English Studies approaches the genre of adventure fiction is one Wendy Katz. For Katz

Haggard and his fellow romancers encouraged a view of Empire that virtually ignored its material reality. The matter-of-fact world of factories, ships, military equipment, loans, stock market investments and railways which sustained the Empire and the vast material wealth that created it were kept at a more than respectable distance from popular literary depictions of the phenomenon....To see the literature of Empire in perspective, therefore, it must be viewed against the seemingly incongruous background of balance sheets, technology, and a most immoderate greed. (Katz 1987:108)

Accordingly, Katz considers adventure romance to demand critical attention *only* because its appeal is manipulative, its connection to imperialism fervidly "felt rather than intellectualized" (Katz 1987:59). In other words, we must look at this material very carefully, lest we be deceived by its hidden agendas.

It is essential to pay close attention to the sort of soft propaganda, like Haggard's, that secures interest in the shape of historical romance, fantasy, adventure, or thrillers, and effectively checks one's critical abilities. Such literature...goes a long way towards fostering a limited moral consciousness. Haggard's writing, which certainly contributed to the failure of consciousness in his own time, shows the manner in which literature can work to inhibit a reader's essential critical and hence moral power. Coming to

terms with its ideological force is perhaps a small way of protecting that power from a similar fate today. (Katz 1987:154)

If we accept that *The Lost City* is 'straight out of Rider Haggard' and thus functions to *check* critical abilities and foster a *limited* moral consciousness, then perhaps it should meet with the sceptical intellectual reception of Haggard's most compromised of ideologies? For a critic so persuaded, a reading of *The Lost City* could take the form of critique and denigration; and at best it might provide some form of moral prophylactic, insuring the individual to the sinister potency of a now vastly expanded commodified leisure that was once restricted to the more manageable genre of the adventure romance.

What we idealising academics might allow, though, is that contemporary cultural experience, marked as it is by the shifting of traditional boundaries among types of cultural product, process, and reception, is seldom 'straight out of' anything. Indeed, I have been implying that it is precisely in relation to the energetically volatilised, syncretic, mass cultural repertoires through which commodity culture is experienced that the tropes of adventure, romance, and fantasy informing *The Lost City* are likely to be granted their *complex* intertextuality. Thus instead of merely lamenting, with Jon Savage, that "because we are now all enrolled in the Culture Club...consumers are now trained – by endless interviews, fashion spreads, 'taste' guides...to spot the references and make this spotting *part of their enjoyment*" (1989:171), we might find something worthwhile in contemporary audiences' willingness to value intertextuality, to allow the mass-mediated contemporary experience its dispersed cultural referents, to recognise and relish in commodity culture the palimpsest nuance which English Studies academics have often wanted to preserve as the terrain of a more recondite Literary Culture.

For the sake of that literary critic who still considers her field to be that of the printed text (perhaps I'm setting up a pathetic straw figure), let me proceed by relating my discussion to a number of adventure novels. I begin by outlining the expected responses – that these are slight and ideologically-compromised texts in which may be found *The Lost City*'s obvious prototype. What I gradually hope to demonstrate, however, is that even if we remain with the fairly conventional, debased fictional form of the adventure novel, and even if we grant its intersection with *The Lost City*, we are faced in our analysis with a web of intertextual references and referrals which implies that *The Lost City* has a circuitous and quirky genealogy, one to which ambivalent rather than merely cynical responses are possible. The much-read adventure fiction of Henry Rider Haggard seems an especially useful point of departure, in that it both harks back to conceptions of Africa which were already in circulation in the late nineteenth century, and substantially alters them. This backwards and forwards projection in time is important in understanding *The Lost City* as a cultural form in which the very pastness that is central to its identity may at once be reconfigured in the service of an imagined future.

Haggard is well-known as a writer of imperial adventure-romance. Having achieved commercial success with the publication of his third novel, *King Solomon's Mines* (1885), Haggard went on to become a celebrity in his day, prominent in literary circles on account of a prolific authorship which included fifty eight novels, newspaper and periodical correspondence, short stories and autobiography. I cannot possibly cover in great detail either his own body of work, or the substantial body of literary criticism to which it has given rise. But in speculating about the kinds of tropes which underlie the initial design and the subsequent public reading of *The Lost City*, I would be naive to deny links between the narrativising of the resort and the nexus of myths or "allegory of imperialism" (Christie, Hutchings and MacLennan 1980:20) which infuses famous adventure novels by Rider Haggard such as *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) and *She*

(1886), as well as other of his novels which were based on heroic adventure and exotic African settings such as *Allan Quatermain* (1887) and *Nada the Lily* (1892).

Haggard is credited with promoting the revival of romance in late-Victorian times by tapping into the public's secret desires, and it is worth remembering that his first commercially successful novel, *King Solomon's Mines*, appeared in London in September 1885, only a few months after the European powers had met in Berlin to draw their plans for the apportioning of Africa. As Peter Haining makes clear, Haggard is reputed to have contributed to the late-Victorian appetite for romance by "draining the whole reservoir of the public's secret desires"; he "tapped the mystical hankerings after reincarnation, immortality, eternal youth, psychic phenomena. He tracked down priestesses and gods. So, in a peaceful age, he drew on preoccupations with slaughter; and, in an empire-building age, on fantasies of absolute, spiritual rule in secret cities" (1981:12). In some ways, the actual and symbolic topographies associated with *The Lost City* – barrenness rendered paradisaical, picturesquely reconstructed wilderness, legendary monumentalism, the sublime promise of wealth, and exhilarating adventure – might well be taken from the fiction of Haggard. His favourite themes, to express the matter simply, were tribal Africa, Ancient Egypt and rural England, all inflected with a substantial degree of the mystically supernatural and the nostalgic.

Although no doubt embellished, aspects of Haggard's own life-story may have provided material for his fictional characters, since between 1875 and 1881 he was resident in South Africa. At the risk of banalisation but at the same time seeking to highlight the particular aspects of Haggard's own story on which his detractors might focus, let me say that at the age of nineteen he was employed in a managerial capacity by the colonial administration in Pietermaritzburg, where he was placed "in charge of hiring servants, ordering food, and arranging for entertaining" (Katz 1987:7). Duties did not stop the curious young man from exploring his exotic surroundings, however, and on one occasion a fascinated Haggard reputedly accompanied Bulwer "to Chief Pagate's kraal where a war dance was being performed in honour of the Lieutenant-Governor" (Katz 1987:7-8), and hundreds of black figures staged a synchronised display of 'tribal' movement and costume. In 1877, Haggard became a colonial functionary in the Transvaal retinue, helping to carry out what has been called a 'champagne and sherry policy' in which he was needed to organise entertaining. His experience of Africa, then, was shaped in the context of imperial campaigns which foregrounded a metropolitan 'cultural imperium' and the discourses of exoticism that were so much a part of imperial practice. He was especially fascinated by the ruins of Great Zimbabwe, popularly publicised as having been 'discovered' by Carl Mauch in Mashonaland in 1871, and he conducted "researches among the tombs and relics" of Egypt when they were being unearthed "by men such as the great Howard Carter of Tutankhamen fame" (Haining 1981:14). It is spectacularly publicised archaeological events such as these which inspired Haggard's passion for lost races and civilisations. These 'discoveries' gave historical and geographic specificity to age-old beliefs about lost civilisations and, indeed, whatever the cultural-architectural sophistication of the civilisations that were unearthed, worked to fuel an enduring conviction that there existed, in remote and inaccessible parts of the world, an as-yet-unrevealed human race which was untainted by modern civilisation. The prelapsarian myth and the artefactually-splendid history led Haggard to develop what is sometimes called the 'Lost Race' genre of adventure fiction.¹⁰ Hall goes so far as to claim that it was the "re-valuing of the Legend of the Lost City that followed from Mauch's expedition [that] launched" Haggard's literary career (1995:186).

Consider the following extracts from *King Solomon's Mines* as typical instances of Haggard's matter and method. Each is articulated by the narrator-protagonist Allan Quatermain:

After filling ourselves, we lit our pipes and gave ourselves up to enjoyment, which compared to the hardships we had recently undergone, seemed almost heavenly.

The brook, of which the banks were clothed with dense masses of a gigantic species of maidenhair fern interspersed with feathery tufts of wild asparagus, babbled away merrily at our side, the soft air murmured through the leaves of the silver trees, doves cooed around, and bright-winged birds flashed like living gems from bough to bough. It was like paradise. (1985:85-86)

Such idyllic representations, though, exhibit massive dissonance in relation to the discovery of expressly material wealth which soon follows. As the adventurers prepare to enter King Solomon's treasure chamber, Quatermain observes that their "excitement was so intense"

that I for one began to tremble and shake. Would it prove a hoax after all, I wondered, or was old da Silvestra right? and were there vast hoards of wealth stored in that dark place, hoards which would make us the richest men in the whole world? We should know in a minute or two. (1985:209)

In the chamber, "a room hewn out of the living rock" (1985:212), the men find firstly "a splendid collection of elephant tusks...enough ivory before us to make a man wealthy for life" (1985:212). They then happen on "about a score of [red-painted] wooden boxes" which are "full, not of diamonds, but of gold pieces" (1985: 212) marked with Hebraic inscriptions. Finally, they come across "three stone chests" and for a while cannot make out what they see "on account of a silvery sheen that dazzled us. When our eyes got used to it, we saw that the chest was three-parts full of uncut diamonds, most of them of considerable size.... 'We are the richest men in the whole world', I said" (1985:213). Such sudden wealth, at once supposedly serendipitous and supposedly just, we have already met in the legend of *The Lost City*.

Indeed, considered in the dimensions not only of space but of time, the ideological landscape of Haggard's fiction can also be read, by the dystopian critic, in terms of the all-too-familiar markers of a history of European engagement in Africa that is implicit in *The Lost City* mythologising. Rider Haggard's work is characterised by a "pursuit of the past into myth" and "the projection of mystery into the present"; it asserts "the moral and technical superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race" even in the time of prehistory, and it associates "the expression of, or indulgence in, sexual fantasy" with the romance quest more broadly (Christie, Hutchings and MacLennan 1980:20). For its detractors, much the same would be said of *The Lost City*. Like Haggard's numerous adventure romances, the romance of the *Lost City* is a form of neurosis, its imaginary lost tribe being an elite surrogate for a "bourgeoisie in search of an aristocratic world" (Christie, Hutchings and MacLennan 1980:26).

In all, it is Haggard's characters, settings, plots and narrative pace which many critics would argue give substance to an heroic ideology of imperial adventure. The pre-eminent character is Allan Quatermain, who appears in eighteen of the writer's works of fiction. While Quatermain is perhaps the author's inspired version of Haggard himself, he also has escapades derived from those of John Gladwyn Jebb, a rugged nineteenth-century adventurer and muscular romantic given to exploration of the uncharted frontiers of the world. In Haggard's novels, members of an adventurous character-cast must endure extreme climatic, geographical and social conditions in order to merit their arrival at the heart of Africa – the undeserving peripherals perish along the way, and the eroticised, exotic landscapes tend to grant the heroic protagonists final access to ancient, and long-buried versions of Africa as harmonious cornucopia and paradisaal repository of unlimited wealth. This is undoubtedly the world of romance where, despite a sometimes haphazard and superficial style, Haggard has the capacity "to draw us into the tale and then compel us to hang on while he rushes helter-skelter from one cliff-hanging situation to the next" (Haining 1981:12).

Such action-packed adventure in both southern African and exotically foreign climes is also considered to be a staple of the South African popular novelist Wilbur Smith, who is most

frequently cited as Haggard's 'successor'. (As I discuss later, it has been remarked in the newspaper journalism generated by the launch of The Lost City that the "swashbuckling and shady" life story of Sol Kerzner "might best be chronicled...[in] a Wilbur Smith blockbuster" [Burton 1992:223].) It is in Smith's 1972 novel, *The Sunbird*, that the narrative of The Lost City and Kerzner's role in this story is most clearly prefigured. (Tim Couzens's discussion of *The Sunbird* [1982b] and that of Martin Hall [1995], provide useful pointers for a critique of the matter and method of an adventure romance genre.) In *The Sunbird*, figures of hotel magnate, adventurer, and archaeologist are involved in the unearthing of one of Africa's much-mythologised ancient locations, the Lost City of the Kalahari. "Whereas Haggard represents expanding British Imperialism", Couzens explains in "The Return of the Heart of Darkness", "Smith contains the tensions of South African imperialism" (1982b:49). Rather like the authors of the legend of The Lost City, we could maintain, Smith "has localised Haggard" by picking "up every oddity and piece of crackpot archaeology and anthropology lying around". Smith's "book is filled with the images of the brash and rampant South African bourgeoisie" (Couzens 1982b) which will become the literary relatives of the industrialist Meiring, in Gordimer's *The Conservationist* (1974). Smith's own fabulously wealthy entrepreneur, Louren Sturvesant, implicitly a fictionalised 'commodity' who, like his 'namesake', possesses an international passport to pleasure, is "building a chain of luxury vacation hotels across the islands of the Indian Ocean. Comores, Seychelles, Madagascar. Ten of them" (Smith 1972:21). Under Sturvesant's patronage is the character Ben Kazin, Director of the Institute of African Anthropology and Prehistory in Johannesburg, who has in his possession an aerial photograph of a lost city in the deserts of northern Botswana. And so the plot thickens. Hall (1995) indicates that the Kerzner analogues in *The Sunbird* are many, and as I illustrate in more detail later in the Chapter, Kerzner is widely envisaged in the media through the character-formulae that have been popularised by the genre of adventure-romance: he is the capitalist and cultural visionary; the working class boy made good; the sexually and financially driven hero. Even beyond the shortcomings of fictional and experiential narratives that favour larger-than-life character, we could argue that features of Smith's adventure novel ('irresistible' pace and excitement, dramatic incident, history and consumption as synonymous forms of adventure) all inform the very architecture, design and theme park adventure facilities that are on offer at The Lost City. In effect, for the negative critic, the borrowing by the producers of The Lost City of the formulaic features of a morally-deficient adventure romance must surely encourage a similarly sceptical critical assessment of the resort.

Yet whatever the assertion that The Lost City is merely a direct derivation of Haggard's fiction, or that of his contemporary heir, Wilbur Smith, it remains the case that the fiction of *many* adventure novelists could be usefully analysed in relation to the tropes which inform The Lost City. Notwithstanding my attempt to make a case for the tropic correspondences between Haggard's work and The Lost City, for instance, I have already, in introducing the single complication of Wilbur Smith, acknowledged that the romance patternings, scale, and pace of Haggard's novels are insufficient 'explanation', as it were, for the adventurously themed leisure resort erected in early 1990s South Africa. It is well but inadequate and incomplete to claim that Haggard's descriptions of an idealised Africa are *pre-eminent* among prototypes for The Lost City. My own critical narrative in the immediately preceding discussion of Haggard and Smith, certainly, has kept wanting to break beyond an account of these texts as direct phenotypes of The Lost City. A reading of Haggard, as several critics have pointed out, is also to be understood as mediated through the work of other novelists: Rudyard Kipling, Robert Louis Stevenson, Andrew Lang, George Henty, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Robert Ballantyne; Edgar Rice Burroughs, Michael Moorcock, Hammond Innes, and Wilbur Smith (Gray 1979; Couzens 1982b). These are

among the writers whose novels might be considered intertextual with Haggard's adventure fiction. If the web of possible references is so extensive, can we maintain the rather simple critical position that 'The Lost City is straight out of Rider Haggard'? I think not. Nor is it merely that my Chapter cannot map the correspondences amongst all of these writers merely on account of spatial constraints. Rather, it is that the connections – and the disjunctures – are unmappable in any kind of ideological entirety, and with any kind of ideological certainty. If this in part implies a disabling inability to produce a cognitive mapping of late-twentieth-century cultural practices, it *also* suggests that there are gaps and opportunities in an imaged ideological Master Narrative such that 'other' meanings become possible. The 'meanings' able to be devised between Haggard, The Lost City and other instances of fictional narrative elude my own critical mastery and compel me to acknowledge that if Haggard's ideological universe inevitably comes to mind in an intellectual mapping of the 'African adventures' of The Lost City site, the analogies are also indirect and subject to multiple mediations. They are characterised as much by refraction as by any simple mirroring, by dispersal as by manifest coherence.

Tracing The Lost City Beyond the Printed Page

One way of escaping the net of printed mediation in relation to The Lost City and at the same time extending the network of complex intertextuality is to turn to the likelihood that The Lost City is not explicable solely in terms of the adventure novel. Few users or audiences would understand the resort primarily with reference to the literary text, however broadly academics might be persuaded to define 'the literary', and we could consider, in relation to adventure novels, the pervasiveness of filmed versions of adventure fiction. If it is true, for instance, that *King Solomon's Mines* sold more than 650 000 copies before the author's death in 1925, has never been out of print, and has regularly been prescribed in both British and colonial education, many popular classics tend these days to acquire their widest circulation not through the medium of print, but through cinema. *King Solomon's Mines* is an apt example. The novel has been filmed at least seven times, and both the original 1937 Michael Balcon version made by Gaumont British Studios, and the most recent (1985) remake continually engage with the 'original' nineteenth-century political and psychic economies of Haggard's novel, although they also introduce more 'topical' cultural vectors such as a male-female love interest. Even in turning to film as a way of extending our response to The Lost City, though, what we are likely to come up against are versions of the same accusation of moral complicity. As Jeffrey Richards sees it in his article on feature films and imperialism, the movies evoke the romance of "the pioneering days of exploration, construction and profit, construed and legitimated as adventure" (1986:146), and further embellish 'romance' as romantic love. Similarly, in his article of 1995, Martin Hall argues that if a "light entertainment" film like *King Solomon's Mines* is "slippery" in its ideological orientation, combining "slapstick and special effects with a fast moving story", this does not have the effect of parody. Instead "the old mythology is repeated without challenge" and "brings the old Legend of the lost City into the mass system of circulation of modern popular culture" (1995:196). In other words, celluloid images superficially alter yet fundamentally reinforce the negative tropes of African adventure that exist in print.

In pursuing this line, it is also pertinent to note that several film versions of Haggard's novels, in their hyperbolic display and formulaic ethnographies, adopt cinematic strategies popularised by Cecil B. DeMille in his big-budget Hollywood adventure epics of masculine-colonial prowess. The American director DeMille, with a career spanning 1914 to 1956, is one of the few film-makers who could be said to have been a popular, 'house-hold' name. He is often associated with a highly commercialised body of work: "vulgar Hollywood versions of Biblical

and Roman history” such as *The Ten Commandments* (1923), *Cleopatra* (1934), and *Samson and Delilah* (1949), “Bible and box-office” films which were “sold with sex and spectacle” (Wintle 1981:90-91). His best work is often considered to be that from the 1930s and 1940s, a series of big-budget adventure films that mythologised the events and the already semi-legendary characters of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American history: railroad builders, outdoorsmen, survivors against natural disaster and adversity...*Union Pacific* (1939), *North West Mounted Police* (1939), *Reap the Wild Wind* (1942) and *Unconquered* (1947) were films of epic proportions in plot, cast and indeed overall conception. They relied on the dramatic spectacle, simplified narrative, rapid pace and exaggerated delineation of character that critics associate with the chronotypes of adventure romance. Further, while not necessarily fair to the man, the name ‘DeMille’ is also often thought to embody Hollywood as an institution: its early drive to commercialisation, “its supposed values, its cynicism, excess and success” (Wintle 1981:90). Many of his films were all-star vehicles which enjoyed massive financial success, and their popularity was bolstered by DeMille’s customarily vigorous promotion campaigns which were conducted through various mediums. It is hardly surprising, then, that a *Mail & Guardian* journalist who sought to summarise the architecture, theming and the media spectacle that was staged for the launch of *The Lost City* characterised the phenomenon as being “By De Mille, via Rider Haggard” (Rumney 1992:23). The phrase “via Rider Haggard”, too, brings us to films that are loose derivations of Haggard’s novels. Consider the 1987 Golan-Globus production *Alan Quatermaine and the Lost City of Gold*, which has several times been a prime-time feature on SABC television. The film involves high adventure in a multi-tribal African location, where a number of high-risk travails are ‘mastered’ by the explorers Quatermaine, his love-interest Jessie, Umslopogaas and their retainers. A quaking bridge, several slide chutes into different worlds and time zones, raging rivers – all of these could be said, in the spirit of the adventure romance that I have already discussed in relation to Haggard’s fiction, to be the ‘generic’ models for the fun rides at *The Lost City*. The corroboration and deferral of meaning proliferate. At the peak of *The Lost City* launch period, for instance, CCV’s “Pick of the Day” was the 1985 remake of *King Solomon’s Mines*. The film was billed as “an Indiana Jones type adventure yarn with loads of fun and action. It is the tale of a safari into Africa in search of legendary diamond mines” (*Sunday Times TV Times* 1992:7). While critics often take Haggard to task for mystifying the material imperative which underlies his adventurers’ apparently more humane quest for a lost relative, no such occlusion can be said to apply in the advertisement for the film: the impulse is towards extraordinary pleasure and self-serving gratification. In fact, the potential audience was urged by the publicity in the press to “Come in search of viewing treasure”, an explicit injunction which capitalises on the pervasive appeal of fantastic discovery and the fantastical will to dramatic accumulation of capital.

Notice, however, the frequency with which I am obliged to keep referencing, ‘counter’ referring, turning and returning in my attempt to map the meanings of *The Lost City*. Re-turn, at this point, to the *Sunday Times TV Times* advertisement for the film *King Solomon’s Mines*. Notice the reference to Indiana Jones, which aptly testifies to the intermediations and dispersals of commodity culture, and the difficulty of attributing to a single, homogeneous ideological source the always-in-circulation concepts of idealised adventure in exotic locations: the ‘original’ *King Solomon’s Mines* (or should this rather be expressed without the cursive distinctiveness and implicitly attributed authorship: *King Solomon’s mines*?) is not directly accessible to many members of a late-twentieth-century South African audience. Even a fairly recent, mid-1980s filmic version of Haggard’s nineteenth-century novel must be explained through analogy in terms of a broader contemporary cinematic genre which includes such Steven Spielberg adventure

blockbusters as *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, as well as *Romancing the Stone*, *Jewel of the Nile*, and sci-fi permutations such as *Congo* and *Jurassic Park*, both of which present 'human prehistory' as the subject of rollicking adventure. You can probably add to this list of filmic permutations. You may even enjoy doing so, and in doing so help to substantiate my point.

Repeatedly, The Lost City is 'explained' in the media through filmic analogy: "As they say in the movies, 'if you've got it, flaunt it'...this is showbiz....The special effects are awesome" (*Harpers & Queen Journalist* 1994:115). That is to say, The Lost City exceeds the parameters of conventionally-understood architectural space, deriving a good deal of its effect from the codes of visual display through which we make sense of popular film, especially the pyrotechnics of the adventure genre. The codes, here, also exceed the visual. They are increasingly bodily in that they draw on many of the senses, as well as virtual in that they assume a conscious knowledge of such play. They also have to do with special 'FX' in which technology has a star billing analogous to that of the human cast, or in which technological dramatics are computer-generated so as to achieve a hyper-real degree of verisimilitude that is at once accepted and experienced by viewers as 'reality' and decoded as a suspended aesthetic frame which parallels actuality. There is plenty of opportunity, I think, for The Lost City to be analysed by film specialists; even though the resort is not 'film', it is highly cinematic in the relation it assumes between cultural structure and audience. Such analyses might also detail the innovative professional technologies used by the design and engineering specialists to simulate the textures of rock and stone, as well as the engineering expertise required to fashion safe yet 'wildly-exciting' adventure locations such as The Bridge of Time, and the Volcano. I do not propose here, to pursue the intricate specialisations of those professions related to film: I am merely offering a number of possibilities available to the researcher who is interested in exploring the role played by The Lost City in contemporary South African commodity culture.

What is increasingly evident in my discussion, I hope, is that for the literary-cultural researcher it is probable that even a genealogy informed by specific filmic cross-reference should not be allowed to exhaust the tropes of adventure and discovery that are mobilised in The Lost City. The complex signification of The Lost City refuses the boundaries of generic categorisation, whether adventure novel or film; it demands that the researcher take serious account of volatilised rather than discrete cultural repertoires. Once we admit such proliferation, it seems curiously inadequate either to search out correspondences between plots and settings, or, further, to mount a case for the damning ideological consensus of printed or filmic narratives that are informed by the structures of romance. As I see it, the issue is not that a discourse of romanticised exoticism is so pervasively evident in the work of writers and directors such as those referred to above as to render mythologised images of Africa *secure*. Rather, their erratic repeatability suggests an *inability* ever to fix Africa as unchanging and as exotic. Paradoxically, it could be thought to imply an enduring but unfulfilled wish on the part of many 'colonial' or 'metropolitan' producers of culture to sound the meaning of that lack in the imperial self which Africa seems to reveal. This is not quite the same thing as arguing, with Chinua Achebe (1978) in his memorable essay on *Heart of Darkness*, that within prevailing discourses on Africa the continent functions merely as the backdrop against which to explore the European mind. But it is to suggest some of the psychologically elusive ordinates through which 'Africa' and 'Europe' have been imagined. The appeal of what critics sometimes dismiss as an exotic, romanticised 'Africa' such as informs either Haggard's work or The Lost City is perhaps suggestive of a neo-primitivist desire to discover meaning in an increasingly urbanised world.

Romanticised tropes of 'Africa' and 'adventure', then, are complicated. On the one hand, for example, we understand that in the genre of romance "Reason and geography must be thrown to the winds...romance must ignore the political and economic reasons for exploration, and turn the scramble for Africa into something of the perennial imagination" (Christie, Hutchings and MacLennan 1980:22). Yet if we then turn to the inevitable 'other' hand – one which, as I have been suggesting, has tended to be othered in the already demonised conceptualisation of commodity culture, treated as a sinister, underhanded form of manipulation – we are also confronted with the probability that the imagination itself is a powerfully appealing force which tugs against sociopolitical moorings. This is especially true given the disjunctures and quirky syncretisms that I have argued are by now a commonplace feature of many people's experiences of late-twentieth-century commodity culture. Thus it is not enough to generalise with Salman Rushdie that adventure is "a pretty well exclusively Western phenomenon...a movement that originates in the rich parts of the planet and heads for the poor. Or a journey from the crowded cities towards the empty spaces, which may well be another way of saying the same thing" (1990:224). This conceptual movement very comfortably categorises coherent positions of Self and Other; it conveniently displaces Rushdie to the morally-secure margins of the phenomenon that he critiques, rather than struggling, for instance, to locate the role of the celebrated international writer in what are often labyrinthine narratives of travelling theory. We need to consider more meaningfully the implications of the phrase 'imaginary homelands', the title of the volume from which Rushdie's comments are taken, and to allow the circuitous and capacious resonances of adventure, romance and discovery in various spheres of contemporary mass-mediated life.

Turning to newspaper reviews of *The Lost City* launch, we find evidence of decidedly eclectic cultural circulations that breach generic and disciplinary categorisations, and distinctions between fact and fiction. While this may be disquieting to the literary critic who by training invests preferential meaning in forms of *literature*, it begins to seem probable that the resort can only be 'read' through a vast range of cultural knowledges that has little respect for conventional cultural niceties such as 'high' and 'low', 'serious' and 'popular', 'true' and 'artificial'. Journalism, for instance – and for many this comprises a popular cultural literacy – makes sense of *The Lost City* by referring to actual archaeological sites such as Luxor in Egypt, and Great Zimbabwe, often with a knowing nod to the deliberate fakery of the Sun International resort, and it also draws comparisons between the fabrications of *The Lost City* and the obviously invented locations of themed leisure around the globe (and, as I have said, with the imaginative 'unrealities' of film locations). Indeed, it is feasible that 'consumers' of *The Lost City* and its representations understand the resort in terms that are culturally and conceptually undisciplined, and hence, I would argue, extremely productive. Playing with the terms 'legend' in its cartographic sense of 'reader's key', let me suggest that the 'mind map' of 'The Lost City' may entail complicated interpretation: its 'keys' may include not only those locations habitually regarded by many intellectuals as self-evidently crass and part of every urban philistine's debased, Americanised cultural repertoire (Disneyland, DisneyWorld, and Las Vegas, for instance), but also a startling array of cognate forms, a repertoire which disregards, even disrespects, accepted notions of taste. In producing informal readings of *The Lost City*, people may draw on their culturally mediated experiences of ancient and modern sites as diverse as the Kingdom of Prester John, Ophir, the Lost City of the Kalahari, Atlantis, Monomatapa, El Dorado, Macchu Picchu and Pompeii, alongside Disneyland, Caesar's Palace, The (Las Vegas) Luxor Hotel, The MGM Grand and themed shopping malls like The Pavilion, with its cinema-complex styled to simulate an ancient Egyptian tomb. The knowledge archive through which *The Lost City* is popularly decoded

might also encompass *National Geographic*-type travelogues and ethnographic features, the photographic images from coffee-table travel narratives and those of the *Time-Life* encyclopedia series on *Lost Civilisations* ("Join archaeologists as they uncover their latest findings...Lost Civilisations"). Then there are Reader's Digest volumes like *Wonders of the World* (The Lost City is glossed by innumerable journalists "The Eighth Wonder of the World") and *Quest for the Past: Amazing Answers to the Riddles of History*, which claims to unearth "the facts behind every legend", to find the "truths at the heart of every fanciful anecdote". There are also imaginative travel 'histories' such as *The Seven Lost Trails of Africa* (1930 and 1949) by Hedley Chilvers, a volume which contains chapters entitled "The Lost Valley of the Precious Stones", "The Search for the Great Diamond Craters", "The Buried Millions of Lobengula" and "The Forgotten City of the Forest"; and *The Lost Cities of Africa* (1959) by Basil Davidson, a writer who, for all his lack of academic rigour, is credited by some as having popularly "rephrased the information he found in scholarly studies, making it palatable to a wider audience" and thereby countering the assumption that "Africa had no history" (Taylor and Taylor 1988:3). *The Lost Cities of Africa* was given renewed circulation in a recent volume in the Fielding's travel guide series, *Fielding's Literary Africa* (Taylor and Taylor 1988), which offers "7 innovative itineraries, for travelers and armchair explorers, that reveal the Africa of the ancients, Victorian Africa, and the Africa of today – and tomorrow!" (Rear of dustjacket). I cannot resist, either, making mention of T.V. Bulpin's *Your Undiscovered Country* (no date), forty views of southern African geography and history published with the assistance of the South African Tourist Board with collector's cards available for purchase from Total service stations. This text has chapters on the mysterious "Lake Fundudzi", on "Ghost Mountain" and "The Mysterious Ruins" of Rhodesia, among which is Great Zimbabwe, placed adjacent to chapters more prosaically presented on "The Kruger National Park" and "Table Mountain and its Cableway". Each of these locations is implicitly connected in its imagined appeal for the tourist, an appeal which is framed in the Introduction through the metaphor of fascinating story:

Every mountain, valley, waterfall, plain, desert, forest, village and town has a story about itself. Total and myself dedicate this album to all those who venture forth into the wonderful world around them and set out to learn something of its rich store of legend, tradition, natural history and human story. (no date:3).

Bulpin's text uses discourses which are not dissimilar from those mobilised in relation to The Lost City. Tourism, advertising, promotion, geography, history, travel: all of these are represented as valuable cultural knowledges that may be harnessed to a sense of national pride that allows the country to be publicised through its pre-eminent sites, sights and stories. (Bulpin's text is packaged in a cover image that features the orange, white and blue flag of the 'old' South Africa. I pursue The Lost City as part of a nascent 'new South African' narrative a little later in this Chapter.) Significantly, too, Bulpin's book mixes serious commentary with human interest; surprisingly revisionist takes on familiar subjects with bits of balderdash and even conservatism. Bulpin shapes his accounts with the storyteller's relish for drama and experiential detail, but several entries – that on Great Zimbabwe, for example – offer the youthful collector of the travel cards some curiously enlightened, even progressive information in the easily-digestible form of relaxation, leisure and hobby. It would be misguided for a researcher interested in mapping the meanings of The Lost City to ignore such apparently banal cultural commentary. If early narratives of exploration derived from the journeys of hunter-explorers, missionaries and soldiers in the African interior, as the twentieth century progressed, such narratives tended to develop in the direction of popular travel guides, and related anecdotal accounts of interesting places to visit

and facts to uncover. It is texts like these which have helped to shape the South African tourist imaginary.

Do not forget, either, in this frustratingly infinite mapping of a fascination with exploration in southern Africa, a prime-time SABC television series entitled "Lost Civilisations", an episode of which, for instance, was advertised in the *Mail & Guardian* television guide as "Tonight's tale of glory and tragedy witnesses the collapse of a timeless culture in the reincarnation of a Tibetan god king and the exploration of a real Shangri-La" (*Mail & Guardian* 1998a:12). Or consider another, just-launched television series, given status as the pick of the day: "Tropical rainforests, paradise islands, coral reefs and smoking volcanoes are on the blissful itinerary of SPIRITS OF THE JAGUAR (SABC, 18:00), a new four-part BBC series which recreates the world of ancient civilisations" (*Mail & Guardian* 1998b:12). I cannot claim, in my capacity as researcher, to know exactly what ideological vectors are at work (and at play) in such enterprises. This is also the place to mention long-running South African television programmes of late-1980s and early-1990s scheduling such as "Treasure Hunt", in which the searches of a female treasure hunter and adventurer on location were 'directed' from the studio by the map-reading skills of the studio audience. The programme combined the promise of 'unbelievable' wealth waiting to be accessed by a lucky television viewer with the vicarious thrill of action-packed adventure in exciting southern African destinations. Similar, too, are treasure hunt games like *Finders Keepers*, explicitly styled as a quest and sponsored by the *Sunday Times*, M-Net and the Standard Bank. The following advertisement is designed to resemble an aged parchment treasure map, and is visually studded with a predominantly *South African* variety of 'treasured' cultural artefacts, among them 'tribal' necklaces, a Kruger Rand, settler buildings, the fossilised coelacanth and a few of the Big Five wildlife.

WIN A MILLION RANDS...Once again a million rands lies hidden in a very secret place. Put on your thinking caps, gather your wits about you, and embark on the most exciting treasure hunt of your life. Let your imagination whisk you off on a fantastic journey, as you search between clouds and caves, purple mountains and lush green valleys, and from shores that see the sunrise to shores that glow a burning gold in the fading light of day. Each week, for six weeks, you'll find cryptic clues and secret riddles and rhymes that will lead you ever closer to the place where the million rand lies hidden...All the clues you'll ever need are contained right here within these pages. So you don't have to travel further than your favourite armchair. Unless of course you want to. (Unnumbered 4-page spread in the *Sunday Times Magazine* 1994a)

In some respects, these diverse cultural forms may call on aspects of an 'imperial' mindset which relishes conquest and possession, the appropriation to oneself of knowledge of an Other. For McClintock, if I am allowed to extrapolate from an essay which is certainly intriguing, this contemporary will to the discovery of hyperbolic wealth is analogous to the "Victorian obsession with treasure troves, treasure maps, and the finding of treasure", all of which

may be seen as a symbolic repression of the origin of capital in the labour of people. Finding treasure implies that mineral riches can simply be 'discovered' – thus obscuring the work that is required to dig it out of the earth and, thus, the contested right to ownership. This represents a telling example of commodity fetishism, by which money is represented as able to breed itself. (1990:124)

McClintock implies, for instance, that behind a contemporary 'treasure-quest' unconscious lie (and *lie*) both the colonialism and the capitalism which occasioned South Africa's spectacular birth into a global economy: until "the 1860s South Africa was, from the imperial point of view, a far-flung post of scant allure. In 1867, however, an Afrikaner child chanced upon the first South African diamond" and South Africa was drawn into modern imperial capitalism (1990:97). Read in relation to such cautionary tales, many aspects of commodity culture will forfeit a little of their sparkle. Yet not all. Gold, in both popular imagination and scientific evidence, does not tarnish.

Clearly, this intersects with claims I have already made: just as we search out origins and try to unearth definitive sources and consensual frameworks for The Lost City, critical closure is repeatedly re-ferred and de-ferred, as might well be expected of a highly volatilised contemporary culture which quotes from and glances at texts, discourses and conceptual fields that are eclectic in terms of history, genre, and medium. Far from inhibiting the pleasure of the contemporary consumer, the geographic, psychic, and generic dispersals of the cultural forms with which The Lost City intersects (and even the knowledge that some of these are historical fact and others extravagant invention) may be felt to heighten the intensity of the experiential realm associated with The Lost City. Is this pleasure always to be read as an expansive imperialism? Is it not also, in its breadth, in its disrespect for cultural boundaries, a curious challenge to the Imperium of Taste that even now would prefer to hold sway in those disciplines given to the academic study of culture? If the ideology of 'empire' that forms one facet of The Lost City's syncretic identity is arguably anachronistic in a country long independent from Britain's empire and recently liberated from an oligopolistic Afrikaner nationalism, the metaphors of comic book conquest and fantasy imperialism retain a popularly atavistic life. The Camel Adventurer; the game photographer; the globe-conquering fashion model; the corporate raider; the curio-collecting tourist; the progressive intellectual researching lost voices and cultural memory. The figures appear in guises at once similar yet different, dissimilar yet obliquely correspondent, and render problematic any monovalent cultural prescription.

What about computer games with names like "Lost Civilisations" (the title speaks for itself); or "SimCity", an educational tool popular in the teaching of undergraduate geography in North America, in which players discover the labyrinths of urban planning by inventing and controlling fantasy cities that self-destruct under poor management; or "Tomb Raider", billed as an "Indiana-Jonesesque adventure with spectacular 3-D graphics" where the player assumes the character of an athletic, agile, unflappable female hero named 'Lara Croft' whose search leads you "through four lost civilisations: an Inca city, ruins circa Roman and Greek Golden Age, Egyptian pyramids and a Sphinx, and eventually the pyramid of Atlantis, where the final mystery unfolds". As the reviewer continues, "It's hard not to be near sycophantic about this game: it really is the best thing I've seen in a long time. We can expect a bit of a trend in games of this vein, the gossip wires predict" (Shapshak 1997:14). The cultural researcher is placed in a position where s/he needs to acknowledge that an informal mind map of The Lost City entails co-ordinates more ordinary and less elitist, more hybrid and less narrow, than the texts upon which literary criticism has traditionally worked its 'superior' cultural skills. Even beyond computer technologies, The Lost City asks people to draw on their recollections of the frequently 'exotic' locations of fashion shoots, beauty shows and advertisements, of the products and services of consumer culture....Banana Republic Clothing; Safari fragrance; *Fair Lady's* 1994 Bridal Supplement; Liquifruit's tropical Jungle Punch; Coconut Tropic Oil 'ethnic' body lotion; Go-East exotic fashion; Slumberland 'royal' mattresses – these are but a *few* of the commodities and marketing campaigns which announce their ostensibly exceptional product identity against the mythologised iconography of The Lost City as a location. In pursuing this point, we may speculate that in advertising lies one of the best indicators of the prevailing 'structure of feeling' which mobilises, and is mobilised by, The Lost City. Consider how frequently advertising and consumption are motivated by tropes analogous to those used in publicising The Lost City: tropes of repeated discovery; of pleasure-as-contemporary-treasure; of the ever-deferred satisfaction of desire; of hyperbolic promise and of the uniquely improved modernity that is newer, bigger, better. These set the scene for, and extend the drama of, the fantastic consumer spectacle that Kerzner and Co construct. While his more sombrely materialist arguments do not bolster my own limited version

of poststructuralism, it is not for nothing that Raymond Williams theorised advertising as “the magic system” (1980), a conceptualisation which I am tempted to extrapolate so as to imagine advertising as the most widespread contemporary example of the adventure romance genre. As Sut Jhally explains in a paper on the dialectic of technology and magic, advertising assures us of the discovery and possession of the ultimate, even as the proliferating images of newness, betterness and improved modernity endlessly delay this experience of totally satisfying adventure in a cycle at once frustrating and pleasurable (1989). The figures of exploration, discovery and transfiguration characteristic of late-twentieth-century advertising practices, then, ‘virtually’ guarantee the continued claim on the contemporary imagination of ‘the lost city’ – the location of promise waiting to be found – as site of desire and fantasy.

Thus while *The Lost City* with its adventureland and casino has since its opening fanfare been partially lost to dramatic public visibility, it never completely disappears, instead materialising as an infinitely protean referent of the fantasies, desires, longings, dissatisfactions and dreams that constitute commodified cultural experience. Indeed, the expression ‘the lost city’ resonates with enigmatic connotations, having become a generic for ancient treasures and the hidden promise of archaeological ruins; for mystery and adventure, and the tantalising possibility of mega-wealth that turns the capitalist-consumerist ‘wheel of fortune’. As Wernick argues, the appeal of such promise is surely not available for only suspicious critique: it is poignantly to be expected in national and global contexts that are increasingly characterised by economic and political trauma in which individuals are uncertain of either their personal or collective abilities to alter the course of ‘world events’ (1997). If the turn of the last century witnessed a surge of interest in recently ‘discovered’ aspects of civilisations such as ancient Egypt, a report in the *Mail & Guardian* suggests that “Books about lost civilisations, ancient mysteries and the end of the world are selling millions”. While the writer (probably rightly) ridicules some of the more wacky prophecies of a New Age doomsday literature, going so far as to offer a parodic ten-point plan for any oddball interested in producing a cult bestseller, he also considers that the interest in such texts is scarcely fortuitous: “such works are proliferating as the year 2000 approaches. The sense of an ending induces a fascination with origins, a hankering for long backwards vistas” (Dugdale 1996:1). The report suggests that this is connected to a wish for *self*discovery, and that many of the writers, however lulu their para-literary contributions, are guiding people in their search for “clues to the nature of the sacred, uncovering a hidden, pagan reality beneath...the ‘primary America’ of freeways and malls” (Dugdale 1996:1). Loss, search, discovery, *loss*....The codes needed to map *The Lost City* are elusive rather than merely nostalgic; circuitously implicated in both actual and symbolic economies, they evade critical closure. They cannot merely be assumed to transform us into armchair conquistadors, to produce the reader in a subject position which reduplicates ideological dominance over an exotic Other. Perhaps this is part of many critics’ difficulty with the phenomena of commodified culture: where we might prefer the position of moral clarity and even high ground, the landscape denies us a sure footing.

The variations of commodity culture with which I have been engaging in relation to the tropic patternings of *The Lost City* might elicit mere academic scorn, or at best ideological debunking. For intellectuals, we know, are not susceptible to the facile appeals of myths which, like ‘adventure’, ‘primitivism’ and ‘discovery’, can usually be shown to have a compromised lineage. Yet, as Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson remark, academics should not believe themselves to function beyond the supposedly inferior imaginings of the popularly mythic mind: in the context of official, intellectual discourses, the appeal of such tropes as inform *The Lost City* is implied in the use of “titles like *The World We Have Lost*”, where academics “covertly play with myths of former golden ages which we assume our readers to share” (1990:4). Even those

concerned primarily to deconstruct the imperial discourses of fiction and colonial administration, like Thomas Richards in *The Imperial Archive* (1993), for instance, find themselves investing symbolic import in their theorising of so-called lost knowledges and using chapter headings such as “Lost Horizons” which are intended to signify more than the English novel which bears this title. How often, too, are the embedded metaphors of discovery, recovery, travel and colonisation – metaphors which have arguably acquired a naturalised semantic authority despite the theoretical labours of postcolonial theorists – invoked in order to grant coherence to research narratives: ‘let us explore’, ‘we may claim’, ‘the need to recover lost voices/texts/cultures/writers’, and ‘to unearth the facts’ are but a few obvious examples of supposedly *demetaphorised* expression which are crucial to literary-critical paradigms premised on the uncovering, discovery and rehabilitation of ‘forgotten material’. Such work is often spectacularly publicised in the advertising, journal articles, reviews and interviews which accompany the circulation of new volumes, and is frequently informed by academics’ residual belief in the superior authenticity and purity of the recovered material, when read against the literary forms and conventions which constitute the institutionalised ‘ordinary’. Uncomfortable and far-fetched as the analogy may be, it is possible to suggest, from certain vantage points, that spectacular discursive equivalents of the ‘lost city’ industry – marxist, feminist, black-Africanist, postcolonial and cultural studies – have helped to sustain and re-energise the otherwise lost discipline of English since at least the late 1970s. Nor can we simply debunk the analogy by insisting that the research to which all of this has given rise, unlike the aggrandising imperative of Kerzner’s monument, was informed by a self-effacing, altruistic, ethical imperative. Certainly this morally superior positioning has been *claimed*, and has often been set against the supposed moral lack of traditional Eng. Lit. preoccupations; but it was surely also implicated in the building of (more rather than less glamorous) individual careers and intellectual empires. In other words, even if we as academics somehow manage to keep ourselves separate from the tainted commodity culture that is The Lost City, our own disciplines, indeed our own individual professional narratives, are not easily able to be construed as distinct from the realms of commodified work and leisure. The romance of (knowledge) acquisition and monumental/ising discursive display deeply inform official academic disciplines such as English; they are not just the evidently trite markers of what many consider to be the ideological and easily debunked forms of journey romance, or advertising. While often peripheralised in forms of academic discourse that have sought to secure for themselves the authority of scientific engagement or objective disengagement, manifestations of these tropes are also to be discerned in other forms of institutionalised knowledge that have met with respectable reception. Although I can do this in ways that are only perfunctory, let me take academic archaeology as a case in point. Despite having origins which smacked of the European plunder of the ancient sacred sites of foreign countries, archaeology began in the nineteenth century to formalise its discursive respectability and cultural authority by representing itself as intellectual discipline. Here, somewhat polemically, I’m content to suggest that this status was achieved in part by archaeologists seeking out a relationship for their field that was reciprocal with both popular and more serious notions of what constituted worthwhile civilisation. For instance, archaeology was reworked into a discipline both through archaeologists’ developing the minutely-detailed practical and conceptual methodologies thought to constitute a science, *and* by their publicising of major expeditionary enterprises, spectacular fieldwork, and the subsequent large-scale exhibition of valuable finds. Nor is it adequate to claim that an institutionalised archaeology and anthropology are thankfully free from the egotistical gigantism of popular writing on subjects such as the descent of man, travels in exotic lands, life among the tribes, and so on. Disciplines achieved both popularity and respectability through the labours of ‘heroic’ figures

such as Levi Strauss and Caton-Thompson. While contemporary archaeology has undergone a further rehabilitation in keeping with revisionist efforts to educate people into the cultural significance even of apparently quotidian, unexceptional artefacts, early archaeological rhetoric seems to have reinforced the perception that the cultural worth or perceived 'pricelessness' of a discovery derived in substantial measure from the rarity of its materials: gold, precious jewels, and the like. In some sense, then, it is legitimate (if partial) to argue that the early preoccupations of fields such as archaeology with dramatic and exceptional civilisations helped to foster in the public precisely that popular appetite for hyperbolic 'discovery' and display which is now often (tautologically) criticised by academics as uninformed and superficial. A penchant for heroic discovery such as that I have already discussed in relation to *National Geographic* is therefore amenable to nuanced critical understanding, rather than suspicious critique by academic archaeologists who disavow their own implication in people's wish to delve into the 'mysteries' and 'splendours' of 'fabulous' antique civilisations. The curious correlations between popular and academic discourses could prompt the researcher to be more circumspect about imputing to a commodified fascination with lost civilisations an imaginative deficit. Instead of being treated respectively with sanction and cynicism, the official and the unofficial could be investigated for moments of unsettling intersection, as much as for their alleged moral dichotomy.

Farini Finds the Lost City: the Journey Continued

That *The Lost City* must be read as isomorphic with a discursive set in which cultural exhibition is at once popular and official, material and symbolic, rather than only with much-derided ideas of 'adventure', is aptly illustrated by the particular example of G.A. Farini. In 1886, Farini published an account of his discovery of 'the lost city' of the Kalahari, *Through the Kalahari Desert: A Narrative of a Journey with Gun, Camera, and Note-Book to Lake N'Gami and Back*. Farini's original text has become a collector's piece and is difficult to obtain, but his tale is subsequently retold in Fay Goldie's *Lost City of the Kalahari: The Farini Story and Reports on Other Expeditions* (1963), and in A.J. Clement's *The Kalahari and Its Lost City* (1967), which carries an introduction by distinguished professor of anthropology, Phillip Tobias. Goldie claims in her reworking of the story that "the demand for the information contained in [Farini's original text] grows", along with public interest in the lost city (1963:v). Farini's is a story, then, which attests to the interrelatedness of cultural forms and (un)disciplines such as adventure, travel writing, archaeology and museology, especially if we ascribe its authorship not specifically to Farini or to Goldie, but to a collective fascination with lost civilisations in relation to western modernity and the desire for the discovery of unprecedented wealth and also of unlimited knowledge of 'the human order'. The story might also remind us – as should the more overtly political enterprise of colonialism – that the dream of finding 'lost cities' and empty landscapes available for development has entailed awkward harnessings of imagination and capital, fantastic projection and projections of wealth: it is not the result of motives whose ideologies can be definitively ascertained.

Reputedly born William Leonard Hunt in New York in 1839, Gilarmi A. Farini was a rancher and flamboyant man of independent means. He favoured "fine moustachios" and "gaudy handkerchiefs", arguing that "People expected this sort of thing from a showman – and...they should certainly have it" (Hooper 1954:118-119). At the age of 25, Farini became the second man, after Blondini, to cross the Niagara Falls via tightrope, and he bettered this subsequently by crossing Canada's Chaudri re Falls. Thereafter, he adopted the name 'Farini the Great'. When his performing career ended in the early 1880s, he became an impresario who leased London's Royal Westminster Aquarium and mounted a number of spectacular shows-cum-exhibitions

which featured exotic fauna and curious human specimens. "Mr Farini recognised nothing as impossible when it was a question of satisfying the enormous curiosity of his public. Zulus, pygmies, ladies who swam in tanks like fishes – he provided them all" (Hooper 1954:117). Determined to capitalise further on the fashion for the entertaining and edifying displays of comparative human culture, he sent his secretary W.A. Healey to the Kalahari Desert in 1883 while he returned to America (Marsh 1994:40). Healey was charged with 'collecting' a number of Bushmen and their artefacts and was thereafter to join Farini at New York's Coney Island amusement park with the purpose of "bringing to the notice of the public a party of Earthmen from the Kalahari" (Goldie 1963:35). (Despite the noun 'earthmen', the nomenclature conveys the imagined 'alien' difference of Farini's specimens; the purportedly dwarfish, primitive men are thought to have lived in earth burrows.) In the September of the same year (1884), the 'troupe' returned to London.

Acting as interpretator for Farini's group of 'Earthmen' is said to have been a mixed-race Bushman hunter called Kert (Gert) Louw. (Ever the entrepreneurial showman, it seems that Farini went so far as to arrange in London an audience where he 'presented' Louw to Queen Victoria.) In England, a homesick Kert, in a perhaps reflexive staging of identity and belonging that has since been theorised as central to the creative agency of a performative primitivism, appears to have given Farini the impression that his home country, the Kalahari, was a "hunter's paradise" (Marsh 1994:40) in which was also to be found "fabulous wealth, chiefly diamonds" (Paton 1956:no page). Inspired, Farini travelled to Africa in 1885 on a combined diamond-prospecting and hunting expedition that he also hoped would be good for his health. He was evidently accompanied by 'Lulu', a young man variously said by researchers to be his adopted son or his nephew, Kert, a German trader and several compatriots. (Is the name 'Lulu' one which should alert the researcher to a parodic, game-playing intention? It is clearly a stage invention. The youthful male relative seems also to have been known as 'Cannonball Zazel' and as 'El Nino', depending on the act in question; 'Lulu' derived from a cross-dressing attempt to seduce audiences into believing that the youth was a daring circus diva [Clement 1967].)

Upon arrival in Africa, Farini was joined by a local guide, Jan, and, in the course of a hunting trip, claimed to have happened on the ruins of an ancient Lost City of the Kalahari Desert. As he writes

we came across an irregular pile of stones that seemed in places to assume the shape of a wall, and on closer examination we traced what had evidently once been a huge walled enclosure, elliptical in form and about an eighth of a mile in length. The masonry was of a cyclopean character; here and there giant square blocks still stood on each other, and in one instance the middle stone being of a softer nature was weatherworn....Near the base of the ruined walls were [peculiar] oval shaped rocks...regularly distributed every few yards around the entire ellipse. In the middle was a kind of pavement of long, narrow square blocks neatly fitted together, forming a cross, in the centre of which was what seemed to be the base for either a pedestal or a monument. We unearthed a broken column, a part of which was in a fair state of preservation, the four flat sides being fluted. We searched diligently for inscriptions, but could find none, and hence could collect no definite evidence as to the nature and age of the structure. The approximate latitude and longitude of this remarkable relic of antiquity were about 23 and one half S. lat. and 21 and one half E. long., near the tropic of Capricorn. (Farini 1886a:447)

The "remarkable relic of antiquity" bore no "inscriptions" and was thus more easily available for Farini's own authorial intention. It was the subject, for example, of Farini's poem "Lost City of the Kalahari", which prefigures several elements of the legend used to narrativise Sun International's Lost City resort:

A half-buried ruin – a huge wreck of stones,
On a lone and desolate spot;
A temple – or a tomb for human bones
Left by man to decay and rot.

Rude sculptured blocks from the red sand project,
 And shapeless uncouth stones appear,
 Some great man's ashes designed to protect,
 Buried many a thousand year.
 A relict, may be, [of] a glorious past,
 A city once grand and sublime,
 Destroyed by earthquake, defaced by blast,
 Swept away by the hand of time. (Hooper 1954:141-142)

Farini is a romantic (if not much of a Romantic poet) who is clearly familiar with the by-then conventional practice of recording the most picturesque and sublime aspects of one's travels in verse. (In the absence of more scientific evidence, the poem is intended to function as emotional-rhetorical witness to his dramatic experience.) He is also versed in the figures through which European eyes decoded the ruins of antiquity as lonely relic of the probably splendid past of an earlier, epic civilisation poetically embodied in the figure of a great man. Yet Farini's is not the fearful desolation of a Shelley contemplating Ozymandias. While Farini does not, on his journey, discover instant wealth in the form of that most desirable commodity, diamonds, through the workings of exchange value central to commodity culture he creatively transfigures this potential loss into a cultural capital that was at the time eminently tradeable in the metropolitan intellectual centres of England and Europe. Farini is moved by an enterprising inclination to modern self-advancement. He goes on to describe his adventures in his book and, according to Goldie (1963) and Clement (1967), to read papers before the Berlin Geographical Society (7 November 1885), and The Royal Geographic Society of England (8 March 1886). On his return to London from southern Africa, in fact, he mounts a sensationally successful media spectacle in which he promotes his varied finds – ruins, flora and fauna. The public is said to have flocked to his "Lost City Exhibition" at the Royal Westminster Aquarium, at which were displayed some of the many travel sketches, photographs and maps made by his son, who was already, before the expedition, a successful photographer in New York (Goldie 1963:1).

Whatever his small contribution to botany and biology, when it came to archaeology Farini was without doubt a fraud. Much of his geographical documentation was subsequently disputed: the maps proved inaccurate; he did not travel with advanced equipment; and while Lulu's pictures of the Augrabies Falls survive, the photographic record of 'the lost city' has never been found (Goldie 1963, Clement 1967, Marsh 1994). Farini may have been a shyster of the first order, trading on a gullible public in which, as fellow showman P.T. Barnum claimed, "There's one born very minute". Yet it is possible that the 'mysteries' and factual lacunae which surrounded Farini's trip and the diverse sorts of cultural paraphernalia through which it was disseminated to the public actually helped to *generate* popular interest in the existence of 'the lost city'. Goldie, for example, cites the deliberately gnomic remarks of a certain Tainton, member of a 1952 search in the Kalahari

"I do not say it doesn't exist. I never emphatically believed it did exist....Farini, if he was indulging his fancy, must always have the last laugh, because who can say that the shifting sands did not reveal to his eyes what they later concealed from ours? The Lost City of the Kalahari, if never found, will always remain one of those fascinating enchantments for which Africa is famed". (1963:26)

Even if, in detailing the appeal of the many lost cities attributed to Africa, we were to delimit our attention to the specific area in southern Africa where Farini claimed to have happened on the lost city of the Kalahari, it is clear that people were extremely interested in uncovering the hidden promises of ancient ruins, whether for purposes of literal or intellectual wealth. Successive ventures into the Kalahari desert were made by numerous teams influenced by the Farini account: South African, American, French, English, and Swiss parties set out; there were journies in 1904, 1916, 1933, 1958, 1959, 1960, 1961 and later. Altogether, roughly 26 expeditions were

undertaken, without success, to make good on Farini's account. Both Goldie (1963) and Clement (1967) give details of these trips, and suggest the enduring appeal of myths of a/the 'lost city'. A "Charlie Swart reported seeing a fabulous ruin of white stones in 1905" between the Aha Mountains and the Caprivi Strip; a Martinus Drotsky heard similar descriptions of a lost city from indigenous people, and in 1950 set out determined to find it (Goldie 1963:13). According to Haldeman, who undertook several searches for the lost city, the District Commissioner of what was then Mafeking personally welcomed his 1961 party. The Commissioner represented himself as one who had "made a deep study of the lost, ancient cities of Persia", and was thus "naturally interested in the possibilities of a lost city within his jurisdiction" (Goldie 1963:16). F.R. Paver, then editor of the *Johannesburg Star*, was similarly intrigued. As late as the 1980s, people were claiming to have discovered the lost city. Couzens observes sardonically that the adventure novelist Wilbur Smith, after the publication of his novel *The Sunbird* "actually seems to have found the Lost City – in August 1976 – but has not yet revealed its exact location" (1982:46). Smith advertised his purported discovery in a 1980 article which appeared in a South African edition of *The Reader's Digest*, maintaining that those "silent ruins seemed to paint a powerful lesson that Africa will not tolerate those who come to take her gold and enslave her people" (Smith 1982:31). Well might we sneer at hearing such prophetic counsel from a man who has made his fortune by purveying stories of African adventure that have been characterised by many critics as conservative and even regressive. Yet still might we pause before breaking into the broad laughter which conveys our conviction that searches for 'the lost city' were but expedient marketing ploys or the misguided fantasies of crackpots. Consider the following brief example: a member of Major D.C. Flower's June 1956 expedition which left for the Kalahari from Nottingham Road in the (KwaZulu) Natal Midlands was none other than Alan Paton of *Cry, the Beloved Country* fame (1948). (This novel has long been read by an international audience as South Africa's 'national biography', a tragic portrayal of the classic South African story of racial conflict. Cinematic versions of the novel have been made by among others Korda [1952] and Roodt [1995].) Paton's biographer, Peter Alexander, dismisses the 'lost city' episode as merely a bizarre aberration in his subject's generally more serious life (1994). He explains that Paton joined "five adventurers" in "a harebrained expedition to the Kalahari Desert, travelling in the back of a five-ton truck, armed with a revolver in case dangerous tribesmen were encountered", and that he was parodically "listed in the expedition's preparatory papers as 'scribe and bottlewasher' (1994:311). It is not only the case, however, that while they "travelled over 3,000 miles without achieving their object...Paton seems to have enjoyed himself" (Alexander 1994:311). For if Paton in part treated the journey as occasion for humour and leisure, he was also sufficiently intrigued by the trip he was undertaking to write an article for the *Sunday Express* in which he posed questions about the existence of a lost city and the possibility of this expedition providing photographic evidence of the mythical civilisation (1956). It is also possible that he undertook the journey both for 'adventure' and in the nature of an experiential 'quest' that bore upon his own spiritual-philosophical speculations, and upon the fact that at that stage in his career he found himself without a home in South African politics.

Paton, Chilvers, Smith, Farini, Spielberg, Haggard.... Report, novel, safari, note-book, exhibition, souvenir-collection, photograph.... What is happening, here, is that just as we imagine our critical selves to have 'discovered' the authorial key to 'the meaning' of *The Lost City* – the truth – as it were, we are again confronted with elusive allusion and the likelihood that we are dealing with a *flexible* discursive set of references, tropes, styles, expectations and images, which *dissolve* even as we seek to make them cohere.

Displaying the Nation: Primitivity and Modernity

In charting the links between formal and informal structures which represent culture as adventure and discovery, I must also acknowledge that archaeology was mobilised in the service of the ambitious national identities of the colonial powers, and that archaeological revelations of the wonders of antiquity were frequently taken as visible inscriptions of a nation's modernity. This impressively monumental modernity was emphasised in various aspects of the nineteenth-century exhibitions in which architecture, archaeology, anthropology, technology, literature, industry and other cultural-political economies took part. It is likely, in these contexts, that jingoism worked alongside what was felt to be justifiable pride. The exhibitions, for one, were "gigantic in terms of the range and quantity of the things they display[ed] – appliances, people, rides, and so on", and "also in their architecture", explains Meg Armstrong (1993:226). The extravagant extent of the built structure, the artefactual exposition and the general visual panoply were figures of a nation's projected magnificence. Even the visitor who had attended with the determination not to be moved (as in the case of Charlotte Brontë's trip to the 1851 Crystal Palace) might have found herself juggling the sublime and the ridiculous. In the cultural display that was the exhibition, both the treasured and the quotidian were brought into the ambit of what Armstrong implies was a sublime jumble representative of a nation's imagined potential. World fairs and exhibitions, then, alongside forms such as adventure novels and an archaeology that was implicated in both gentlemanly travel and in more specialised academic exploration, were all discourses of cultural imperium which commercialised, commodified and transformed objects in the course of enacting a modern, cosmopolitan sensibility.

Intellectual assumptions about modernity and civilisation, for example, were frequently defined not only in relation to 'Man's' technological mastery of the environment, but in relation to a number of 'primitive' ethnicities: Zulu life at the 1889 Paris Exhibition, say, or Columbian culture at the World's Columbian Exhibition in Chicago in 1893, or Somaliland natives at an 1898 Crystal Palace Exhibition. These ethnological object lessons and novelties are also comparable to shows such as *Savage South Africa* which, as David Trotter explains, opened at the Empress Theatre in May 1899 as part of a Greater Britain Exhibition. If the exhibition proper functioned as "a showcase for colonial products", the show "*Savage South Africa* offered the public 'a sight never previously presented in Europe, a horde of savages direct from their kraals, comprising 200 Matabeles, Basutos, Swazis, Hottentots, Malays, Cape and Transvaal Boers', plus 'Prince Lobengula, the redoubtable warrior chieftain who was taken prisoner in the Matabele war'" (1990:11; Shephard 1986). In related, equally haphazard ways, the creators of *The Lost City* could be seen to deploy an alluring Africanicity that obliquely intersects with that which has long captured 'the Western imagination'. The Africanicity is evident in the narrativising legend of the lost tribe; in the resort's eclectic ethnic, faux primitif decor; on T-shirts which feature stylised tribal figures; in the "strong East-African feel" (*Fair Lady* Supplement 1992:89) of the fabric used for porters' and room staffs' uniforms; in the 'Nubian-style' of the imposing warrior doormen; in the ancient appearance of many aspects of the setting; in the 'Bushmen' paintings which adorn the walls of the Hall of Treasures; in the upmarket curio shops and African boutiques; in the 'wild animal' motifs which appear on the material used for bedspreads and cushions, carved into doors and decorative wooden panels, set into detailed mosaic flooring and painted on the ceiling of the Rotunda. The Africanicity is materialised, indeed, in the very vegetation: without close inspection, this announces itself as a lush, tropical jungle cognate with that inhabited by Tarzan.

What I find myself unable to ignore though, is that this display of Africanicity brings simulated primitivity into purposeful conjunction with a similar simulation of modernity: indeed,

it is in this impulse, at once bifurcated (primitive/modern) and unitary (simulated), that what I consider to be significant meanings may be found. The Lost City, in its concrete structure, its range of professional expertise, its decor and its advertising of all these areas, is repeatedly situated in the public eye through an artefactual and disciplinary abundance that has been gleaned from both the wealth of African culture, and from around the globe. Glance at a brief extract from the alphabetised index of sponsors included in The Lost City Supplement to *Fair Lady* magazine, where technological achievement, cultural heterogeneity and stylistic range are meant to be emblematic of The Lost City's status: Bilchicks Transvaal, who painted the faux aged and weathered effect of the walls; Contract Lighting International of Atlanta, Georgia, custom-designers of chandeliers for The Palace of The Lost City and suppliers of "fixtures for properties throughout the world"; Eximposa, of Sandown, Johannesburg, who "searched the world for unique, high-quality guest amenities"; Georgia Lighting Supply Company who "created the spectacular, breathtaking chandelier which dominates the Crystal Court. It was made in Italy"; Taung Marble, who "searched all corners of the earth for the high-quality marble required....From Spain came the Crema Valencia; from Italy the Rosso Verona, and from southern Africa the African White, the Taung Marble and the beautiful Portoro Aus"; Trisha Wilson "a world-renowned interior designer who has offices all over the globe...successfully brought a legend back to life, and created the effect of walking back into ancient Africa" (*Fair Lady* Supplement 1992:89). This is exaggeration of a phenomenal order, but it relays narratives of imagined modernity alongside – even through – imagined primitivity. In fact, I would go so far as to say that unless a cultural analyst is prepared to concede this centripetal aspect of The Lost City's design repertoire, in which local and global, modern and premodern are placed in creative conjuncture, s/he is complicit in perpetuating the repressive discourse of essentialised, even stereotyped African difference with which s/he claims to be taking issue. Coombes might insist, in what I must admit is excellent work on cultural display, that we ought to

avoid the uncritical celebration...of a hybridity which threatens to collapse the heterogeneous experience...into a scopic feast where the goods on display are laid out in ever more enticing configurations, none of which actually challenge or expose the ways in which...difference is constituted and operates as a mechanism of oppression. (1994:92)

My point, though, is that the directions of so-called hegemonic power relations are no longer very clear, and that it is insufficient to continue speaking about (or implying) an Other and a cultural Centre and periphery as if these were constant categories. This is a "fetishisation of alterity [that] easily recapitulates an us/them disjunction which has in fact long been fissured and cut across in both direction" (Thomas 1994:159). If we look at the hybrid cultural complexity that is The Lost City, it is not feasible to insist that the resort merely deploys age-old figures of African exoticism (and, implicitly, inferiority) against those of a Metropolitan norm. Rather, the primitive and the modern are placed in volatile interrelation. (And this is further destabilised when we consider that the reception of the resort may potentially combine the parodic and the serious.) Another, necessarily lengthy extract from a consumer-magazine review of The Lost City should corroborate my point:

A vast crystal chandelier dominates the dazzling Crystal Court. The aroma of Italian cuisine wafts from the floating Villa del Palazzo restaurant. Across the Bridge of Time, in a cavern which hides the 500-slot entertainment centre, *Mona Lisa* smiles inscrutably, clasping a master pizza from Leonardo's Pizza Workshop.

Weavers worked for months on the carpets for the Palace, each a unique design. A Balinese craftsman beat the brass for a gigantic gong that will sound for miles around the city. A Turkish palace provided the inspiration for the handcrafted cut-crystal, marble and brass balustrades that line the grand staircase. Heavy Indonesian squara wood forms the huge tusks arching over the Tusk Lounge and Bar. Thousands of carved wooden hibiscus blossoms and arum lilies from Bali add splashes of colour beneath the extraordinary banyan trees in the new entertainment centre's 24-hour Fantasy Cafe. Carved

sausages and fruit made of Thai silk dangle tantalisingly from the knotted branches. It's a designer's dream come true.

In the vast gardens surrounding the Palace, shady jacaranda trees play host to exotic orchids from Brazil, Borneo, Central and East Africa, Malaya, Java, China and Japan. Giant baobabs dominate the hillside and plants from Australia, Zimbabwe, the Comores, Mozambique and Madagascar rub shoulders with indigenous varieties and rare palms from collections in the USA, Panama, Ecuador and the Philippines. Through these lush gardens a man-made river weaves and winds, providing an endless source of water for thrill slides and leisure rides.

It's a magical world of mystery and splendour, where animals leap from towering turrets and mighty columns rest on the stone feet of elephants. (*Cosmopolitan* Journalist 1992:179)

Yes, the account is extravagant, since the journalist attempts to describe the hyperbolic aesthetic through which The Lost City is materialised. And, yes, its register intersects with the cultural catalogue of the imperial archive, which sought to document, enumerate and in a sense rhetorically to 'discipline' cultural exoticism. (When read in the context of the one-page report, it is difficult to judge the extent to which the reporter pokes fun at The Lost City's official advertising discourse: the listing ad infinitum at once brings an image of The Lost City's gigantism and syncretism into imaginative being for an implied readership, and subjects the hubristic scale to bathos.) What is especially interesting to me, though, is that the information cannot merely have been familiar to the reporter; the encyclopedic comprehensiveness suggests that it was made available by Sun International's publicity office in the form of a press kit. This further implies an *official* desire to see The Lost City's built structure circulated in appropriately magnified language: the exhaustive details such as those accumulated in the above feature are considered an important, even essential element of The Lost City's presence and appeal. If this is a commercial-technical utopia which concretely embodies the rationalised, instrumental imperatives so often occluded in romanticised utopian discourses, it also, paradoxically, is not premised simply on the unilinear historical telos that generally underscores utopian thought. The Lost City is a phenomenon that is in some sense 'posthistorical' – not "in the sense of the happy return to nature of certain utopian fantasies of the past, but rather in the sense [of an]...ironic-nostalgic inventory of the talismans of progress" (Vattimo 1992:84), which are consciously understood to represent an accomplishment 'of a sort' in a commodified world where ideals of enlightenment have been but unevenly achieved, and where dreams of progress, even as they continue to be reached after, are simultaneously understood to be built on a utopian Progress in ruins.

Accordingly, the aesthetic codes brought into play in the publicising of The Lost City are paradoxical: at once those which endorse art as elite and rare signifier, and those which seek to rehabilitate everyday objects as artistically meaningful 'design'. In the rhetoric of gigantism through which the resort description is fashioned, we do not find merely explicit claims of magnitude or primacy. Biggest, best, first; or "huge", "unique", "handcrafted": the overt designation works alongside a sense of impressive identity that is symbolically represented in the concatenation of an eclectic variety of materials sourced from geographically dispersed origins, all of which, we are willed into believing, are put to exceptional purpose. All of which leads me to think that the complex ideological and stylistic agendas which inform the resort cannot unproblematically be mobilised in the service of an argument which insists that The Lost City *stereotypes* Africa. In a sense, the perverse *promesse de bonheur* of The Lost City lies in its audacious making *material* of precisely those fantastic significations which have been accredited to Africa in the European imagination. Its discursive melange points to the unrealisability of an Africa *sans* imaginative invention, destabilising in the process naturalised cultural-aesthetic figures of authenticity, modernity, tradition. (I return to related points when discussing Sol Kerzner as 'author' of the resort.)

In working with the resort at a less esoteric, philosophical level, perhaps it is sufficient to suggest that a cultural phenomenon like The Lost City occasions a loose arena in which images of and ideas about South Africa as a worthwhile African region are circulated in relation to discourses about 'the rest of the world'. We understand this 'worthwhile African' - 'South African' ecumene to be vaguely unitary, though not uniform, and we see that it derives from the collection and display of objects as much as from intangible ideas. In this, it is similar to the Victorian ecumene discussed by Carol Breckenridge, who explains that in

the second half of the nineteenth century, everyday things from India were displaced from their ordinary and their sumptuary contexts. They were shifted to terminal and semi-terminal display contexts like world fairs and museums; and they were featured in art and archaeological books, in mail-order catalogues and in newspapers. In these new arenas, objects were managed and valued in modes that were radically different from those of the past. (1989:196)

This created "an imagined Victorian ecumene" which encompassed countries "in a discursive space which was global, while nurturing nation-states which were culturally highly specific" (Breckenridge 1989:196). In other words, The Lost City carries a symbolic capital that is both local and international, both encyclopedic and yet always suggestive of an unrealisable totality. The Lost City's sophisticated, first-world tourist Africa, for instance – embodied especially in the elegant antiquity of the exclusive Palace Hotel – is often defined in advertising as meeting the highest of international standards. (Erstwhile Gauteng premier Tokyo Sexwale, when called upon to justify his living in the upmarket suburb of Sandton, is reputed to have asserted that black people are morally obliged to demonstrate that they can meet modern standards, these being symbolised by Johannesburg's Carlton Centre, and The Lost City.) The silent comparison, here, may well be with those locations of an impoverished 'real' Africa which, if they can offer the authentic wilderness, ruggedness and primitivity that are sought by the adventure tourist proper, cannot simultaneously accommodate the modern, cosmopolitan expectations which mark the game of luxury tourism. But we cannot treat merely cynically the foregrounded comparison with imagined 'European' or 'elite' excellence.

Notice, for instance, that while the resort may be regarded by some with opprobrium as primarily the neocolonial habitus of a cosmopolitan jet-set, and while Kerzner may well have had in mind to focus on the lucrative international leisure market while giving less attention to a domestic trade, other less visible functions of the resort are also important. In considering the metonymic modernity of The Lost City we might remark, for example, that a spectacular sojourn at The Lost City is frequently marketed in competitions as the prize 'trophy' for the imaginings of the ordinary leisure tourist. The Lost City is regularly to be found as wish-fulfilment prize in the sponsored competitions that are integral to the form of the consumer magazine. Here is one such competition, run by Nasionale Pers in *YOU* and *Huisgenoot*:

Six lucky readers who correctly solve this week's TV1 Blockbuster will each win a six-day holiday for a family of four at the exotic Palace of The Lost City at Sun City. This magnificent luxury resort is celebrating its first birthday on December 1, and the total value of our prizes to mark the event is more than R73 000.

Timeless luxury and the magic of emerald forests await you when you set out to rediscover the legend of The Lost City. Spanning 26 hectares, an enchanted valley embraces the lavish and spectacular Palace whose unparalleled grandeur makes it the most extraordinary hotel in the world.

Beyond indigenous gardens, crystal pools and flowing waterslides, lies the breathtaking Valley of Waves. And inside, the sensual extravaganza continues.

Towering African frescoes offset stately palms and tapestries as you enter The Palace, creating an intoxicating atmosphere of stylish excess. Imposing pillars and ornate furnishings complete the effect. (*YOU*a 1993:143)

The drama of The Lost City is configured through material signifiers that include the imposing excess of architecture, furnishing, entertainment and landscaped gardens, and these are at once

African and global, ancient and remarkably contemporary. Further, the visitor is situated in a relation to the venue that draws on the awe-filled wonder of the sublime, as well as the heroising of individual agency as the tourist 'sets out to discover' The Lost City for herself. The tropes, here, are at once those of the gigantic and the miniature. If the contradictory discursive codes perturb the diagnostic academic intelligence, they are unlikely to be foregrounded in a popular reception of The Lost City. For several of the prizewinners in the competition to which I have been referring, at any rate, The Lost City is the apotheosis of tourist pleasure. Pensioner Garth Timm planned to enjoy the prize with his wife and grandchildren, saying: "We'd have no chance of enjoying a holiday like this unless we won it"; while Margaret Strydom quipped: "I can't even tell you who I'll be taking with me because so many people want to come" (YOUb 1993:84).

Further, The Lost City is an increasingly popular southern African conference venue, thought to represent for delegates, many of whom are black Africans, the pleasures of an apparently untamed Africa conveniently alongside those of abundant modernity. The Lost City was the venue for the Organisation of African Unity conference of African information ministers in October 1994, for example, and of the African Tourist Association's African Ecotourism Symposium in November of the same year. More recently – and perhaps more interestingly – the resort has hosted the Dual Congress of Human Biology and Paleontology in late June 1998, an academic conference at which some delegates proposed an 'Out of Africa' theory, which holds that *Homo sapiens* developed in Africa.

Nor is the experience of 'modernity' embodied only in the luxury of The Palace hotel. It is carried in the very simulated antiquity of the popular adventure grounds: the supposedly original built environment of the reputedly lost civilisation discovered at The Lost City 'archaeological site' has had to be elaborately styled through chemical and mechanical engineering so as deliberately to seem 'remains', ruined remnants. The extensive skills and capital that have been lavished on the public temples, pillars, bathing sites and adventure locations in order to produce the desired antiquity-effect are no less than those given The Palace hotel in order to announce its superlative luxury. The Lost Village, Place of Adornment, Valley of the Waves, Monkey Spring Plaza, Kong Gates, Roaring Lagoon, Platinum Mine, Royal Arena, Royal Staircase, Royal Observatory, Trail of Discovery, Temple of Courage, Viper and Mamba Slides, Gold Mine, Adventure Mountain, Sacred River...the mere elaboration of the extravagant names and sites implies something of the financial and applied capitals that have been mobilised in making them material, and works to represent The Lost City as a mark of South Africa's tourist modernity. The tropes may be age-old; but they are creatively re-newed in methods and materials. If many of the fittings, for instance, are fashioned from the by-now naturalised materials of (post)modernity such as plastic, cement and fibre-glass (the visitor could well be imagined to feel very much 'at home' in the faux familiar aesthetic of The Lost City), it is still common, several years after the launch of the resort, to read that another retail-leisure development or product – domed roofing structures, say, or marble-cutting machinery – is using techniques 'pioneered' and 'refined' at The Lost City. The Lost City, then, remains a pre-eminent signifier of an imagined South African modernity.

Another aspect of The Lost City in relation to a South African modernity is the staging of female identity at the resort. This needs a rather circuitous explanation. As much of the preceding discussion has indicated, adventure and discovery are habitually considered dubious, at best superficial tropes, and this critical opinion is exacerbated when account is taken of gender. Critics like David Bunn (1988) have argued, for instance, that the power relations which inform the kind of Rider Haggard adventure fiction that intersects with the legend of Sun International's Lost City is fundamentally misogynist and imperial. The very geographies of Haggard's work – Sheba's

breasts, tunnels, the possession of rapturous treasures deep in the core of Africa – are said to contribute to the mythology of a big boy's own adventure genre. Moreover, if we extrapolate from adventure fiction to advertising, which I have called perhaps the most prolific contemporary cultural manifestation of the romance genre, we are likely to come up against advertising's reiterative staging of the female body as site of a voyeuristic pleasure that exploits desire and commodified discovery as primarily masculine prerogatives.

Certainly, arguments like these are often cogently put, and do have some bearing on The Lost City. At least one of the sensory adventures offered by the resort, one of the pleasurable discoveries, is the uncovering of the female body through various forms of cabaret, dance spectacle, and pornography. Also, The Lost City resort was on three occasions in the early 1990s the venue for the Miss World Pageant, and has hosted the *Cosmopolitan* Supermodel of the Year Competition, as well as major international fashion shows. Of course the so-called 'Miss' World Pageant cannot be cast in quite the same light as pornography, and the pageant organisers have come under increasing pressure from objectors to have the contestants cover more flesh while exposing more of their social commitment and ambassadorial prowess. Yet the pageant is a bodily display, and the exhibition is also overtly connected to the display of another contested discourse: national identity. Given the debates around both feminism and nationalism, it remains difficult to know quite how to theorise this. Let me simply remark, here, that the staging of the Miss World event is a sophisticated form of advertisement. The first of the competitions to be held at The Lost City orchestrated the launch of the resort in 1992 in coincidence with the "collective good looks" of 84 of the "world's most beautiful women reflecting the splendour of the new R800-million complex of Sun King Sol Kerzner" (Quoted in Naidoo 1992:9). Or as organiser Eric Morley claims, "The Miss World pageant is one of the best vehicles to publicise a place as it is seen by over 600 million people on television in 60 countries and in the newspapers of between 50 and 100 countries" (Naidoo 1992:9). What was being publicised here, though, was not only The Lost City as a site of leisure, but The Lost City as symbol of South Africa's 'desirable' attractions as a tourist venue. Even more broadly, we could say that the spectacle was but an instance in the South African exhibitionary complex that was being developed in the early 1990s, as means for the disseminating of positive publicity for the 'new South Africa'. The signification of The Lost City, as I see it, goes far beyond regressive nostalgia or ideological conservatism. It is an aspect of a poignantly parodic but wished for authentic conceptual paradigm in which old, habituated world views and identities are being with difficulty reimagined for a present and a future; in which established, often convenient collective names by which people have tended to signify their group affiliations are themselves being rendered both productively and threateningly unstable: 'Europe', 'The West', 'Africa', 'local', 'foreign', 'international'. (The rage of body piercings, tattoos and affected primitivities in arrogantly first-world countries literally embodies this volatilisation of norms and codes.)

Let me comment on a widely-disseminated advertisement for the Miss World Pageant. This features an enticing, masked female visage above incongruous copy that reads: "Africa unveils her latest goddess of eternal beauty", and urges television viewers not to miss the special, live broadcast of the event. Such advertisements and the spectacles they tout invoke tropes of woman as Beauty, as mystery, as trophic conquest, as object to be looked at. They could even be said to intersect with the various constructions of primitive and ethnic culture already referred to as part of an imperial-colonial exhibitionary complex. A significant appeal of the ethnicities staged at the world fairs and great exhibitions lay in the opportunity for men to view bare-breasted tribal women, and to satisfy, or further arouse, one's (male) curiosity and fantasies concerning myths of unrestrained, voluptuous 'native' sexuality. I remain uncomfortable with some of the

implications of this analogue: the Miss World event is something of a world fair, the contestants the contemporary equivalent of an exoticised Other. In the competition, an iconographic 'She' is selected from among those nations recognised 'as such' by the United Nations. (There could not have been a Miss Bophuthatswana, for instance.) 'She' represents her country, publicising it as 'ambassador'; and 'She' re-presents her country in the very contours of her harmonious proportions, her speech, her charm. 'She' even represents her country as nation by wearing, for one of the sub-events of the pageant, her national costume. While *She* might have fascinated Rider Haggard, none of this fills me with unambivalent delight.

But this said, I can see how the pageant might be used as a platform for the strategic circulation of a range of preferred 'national' images. The so-called national costumes, for example, are far removed from the hegemonic exemplars we might have learnt to recognise as children: clogs and such for Holland; Voortrekker kappie for South Africa. Instead they are overtly fantastic inventions created by fashion designers, and they play with people's familiar assumptions about cultural stereotypes. In doing so it could be argued that they announce the shifting and constructed subjectivity that is 'national identity'. South Africa's contestant in the first Lost City competition, for instance, was Amy Kleinhans. Kleinhans is a coloured woman who, while enjoying a divided vote among South Africans, was meant to symbolise an imagined national identity that had markedly advanced beyond the conventional white beauty lauded by apartheid. Her 'Miss South Africa' title was not uncontroversial, and nor was her political conviction. Kleinhans, rather awkwardly for the organisers and without consulting the local competition committee, refused "to march [*sic*] under the SA flag" (Perkins and Maker 1992:1), which was at the time still the orange, white and blue of the old order. More *conceptually* provocative than was expected of the sexually provocative femaleness in which beauty pageants trade, she insisted that the flag was not representative of at least three quarters of the people she was supposed to represent. She had her way, saying, "There are people out there who would judge me for not carrying the SA flag, but South Africa is going through a transition period"....Politicians across the spectrum weighed in with their comments, few of them supportive" (Perkins and Maker 1992:1). In similar ways, if Nelson Mandela's declared 'infatuation' with teenybopper pop groups like the Spice Girls nearly drove a politically austere Wole Soyinka to keep his distance from the 'new' South Africa, it is the case that Mandela's socialising with the Miss World contestants during the 1994 pageant (after years of ANC criticism of cultural apparatuses such as international beauty shows), conferred on the display and on The Lost City a prestige and political approval. Indeed, it harnessed the spectacle of The Lost City and the spectacular beauty of an international female cast to the identity being formed for a new South Africa. At best, I can say that the place of 'woman' in the narratives of adventure and national romance is not uncomplicated. Reworkings of early ideas of visual regime and the 'male gaze' imply that active and passive, agent and subject, are not intrinsically tied to the conventional gender binaries, and that women may variously exploit the very roles habitually allocated them within apparently male generic contexts. This is also true of women's roles in the perhaps masculine sociogeneric context of national identity. Notice, here, how words such as 'march' and 'parade' are transposed from the idioms of militarism to the more obviously aesthetic context of the Miss World contest, and how Kleinhans's refusal forces a political consciousness into a context that has been 'emptied' of political meaning. It seems reasonable to suggest that in the staging of the Miss World Pageant at The Lost City in three years of the 1990s, specular adventure was being mobilised in the service of an *uncertain* South African national narrative in which modernity was an important, but unstable, signifier. How 'modern' and 'progressive' is it to display female bodies? Is the 'modernity' less in question when used for political effect? I

remain unsure, but even the contradictory adjectives 'latest' and 'eternal' in the Miss World advertisement alert me to the instability of adventure tropes, to the work they are obliged to perform in relation to tradition and modernity as they struggle to secure imaginative purchase. Notice, too, how the participants from an array of international countries are in the rhetoric of the ad subsumed, at least for a moment, under an 'African' agency. 'Africa', in purportedly unveiling her goddess, is given a cultural power that is the creative equivalent of a destructive Adamastor.

Let me turn to other stagings of national identity. A few years down the line from the launch of The Lost City, you may recall that South Africa held the 1994 Presidential inauguration and the 1995 Rugby World Cup. Given the willingness with which I invested emotionally in these events and ideologically 'allowed' them as tentative indices of a newly-democratic national culture, I find myself having to ask whether the Miss World pageant and its thrice-selected Lost City location are not related forms of cultural exposition. Bennett argues, for instance, that expositions and national celebrations "are among the most distinctive of modernity's symbolic inventions"; both these progenies of modernity are "contrived events looking for a pretext to happen" (1991:30). In this sense all of the above are potentially inspirational invocations of imagined community, and they involve ambivalent pleasure and transfer of agency in inviting participants to submit to unrealisable 'utopian' or perhaps 'heterotopian' collectives which are yet construed as desirable.

The repeated turns and returns which make up this Chapter ought to indicate that the interest represented for me by The Lost City resides not simply in what many wish to imagine as its overt ideological compromise, whether we consider this to derive from a relatively recent history of South African internal imperialism, or from the resort's representation of narratives from a more remote colonial-imperial past. I certainly take account of these. But I am also curious about the ways in which familiar figures and tropes associated with the structure and advertising of The Lost City intersect with South Africa's uneven modernities and postmodernities. This is a 'hybridity' much in the public eye and heart at present. Take the global television spectacle of the official opening of the 1995 Rugby World Cup: this was presented in terms of national mini-pageants, where dress, dance, make-up and a variety of tribal and communal cultural tokens were used to highlight the team identities and projected aspirations to victory of South African, Tongan, Samoan, Irish and New Zealand teams among others. This was a masculine display of bodily nationalism not dissimilar from the beauty pageant. Moreover, the opening parade of the World Cup involved cultural displays that seemed intended to function as joyous theatrical affirmation of the South African nation's rebirth into democracy: there was a helicopter flypast immediately reminiscent of the presidential inauguration; there was the Triumphant March of an African queen carried aloft by her rainbow-peopled and sometimes anthropomorphised retinue, to lyrics proclaiming "When the world was born". (The 'theme' song for SABC TV2 gives currency to a related legendary national genesis: "Out of the dust we come, into the new nation. Come alive!") Cultural tropes, it seems, may be paradoxically invoked: now as a tradition which is for all intents and purposes self-evident, and now as testimony to the creative intelligence of the contemporary cultural 'bricoleur' who is inventing the story as s/he reads and writes. In analysing The Lost City, then, I am working with tensions between views that consider culture to be a coherent body – culture as enduring, traditional, structural, and views in which culture is contingent, syncretic, mutable. The Lost City intersects with both discourses: in its display, culture is a process of ordering and systematising, but it is also one of disruption and the accommodating of abrupt alterations as cultural wholes come under systemic stress, and boundaries are constructed and translated.

It is true that The Lost City, both as structure and experience, recalls something of the encounters of colonial adventure and conquest. In its emphasis on the primal energies of nature, chance, the 'jungle', the elements of fire and water, burning torches, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, glinting treasures, wave pools, cascades, palaces...perhaps The Lost City does represent Africa as the mysterious continent of the European imagination, blankly awaiting the adventurer's heroically-assured inscription. Yet in The Lost City enterprise, there seems to me to be a selfconsciously produced 'ethnic luxury', rather than a belief that 'ethnicity' and 'primitivism', 'civilisation' and 'Culture' are inherently binary truths about the kinds of interrelations characteristic of what have been construed as Centres and Margins. So while The Lost City is styled into an opulently extravagant package reminiscent of the ways in which Africa has long been figured in Western consciousnesses, it also entails what I consider to be an unmistakable 'writing back'. If 'The Lost Continent' replete with lost cities, peoples and cultures is how 'Africa' has tended to be envisaged from a foreign perspective (whether in permutations of early travel writing or Hollywood cinema), Kerzner's teams have deliberately *re-presented* the tropes as pleasurably ludic, culturally serious, and potentially very profitable, as much so for southern Africans as for people from 'other' countries; as much so for women as for formulaic Camel adventurers. The Lost City intersects with a pervasive global mythscape in which 'Africa' is exotically different, *and* with local longings for someplace in an 'Africa' that retains vestiges of the awesome grandeur and original power of what is projected as the continent's original, 'real' self. Sun International's attempts to shape corporate and resort identity are ideologically hybrid, and the very hyperbolic advertising campaign for The Lost City provides repeated evidence of a semiotic excess which eludes systematic presentation: 'ethnic', 'primitive', 'traditional', 'classical', sophisticated', 'modern'. What sorts of narrativising designs are at work here? Certainly, they are far from simple. How do technological complexity and the noble primitive, for instance, as at so many world fairs, function at The Lost City as signs and organisers of modernity, and as instantiators of a future? As I see it, the local longings into which The Lost City's simulated identity taps have as much to do with the rise of a black professional class and its performative demonstration-cum-assertion of status, and a desire for something out of the apartheid ordinary, as with the anachronistic colonial nostalgia of either white South Africans or foreigners, or a 'purely' expedient capitalism. The logic always entails a both/and, rather than an either/or. One analogue of Kerzner's resort, for instance, materialises in the largest youth-television co-production ever to be filmed in South Africa: a serial called *The Hidden City*. Locations, costumes and storylines borrow at ahistorical random from the genres of colonial adventure romance and Classical epic, and from the settings of ancient southern Africa, ancient Egypt and ancient Rome. Two teenage boys (one black, one white), "have crashed in dense forest on the way back to Johannesburg from an archaeological dig. Captured by a local tribe, they are dragged into the hidden city, where some of the 'indigenous people' decide that an ancient prophecy...has been fulfilled" (Scott 1995:7).¹¹ But there are other analogues more contemporary in vector. The Lost City has also featured in mass-mediated narratives of upwardly mobile black aspiration. It has been used, for example, as the location for an episode of *The Burning Issue*, a televised situation saga that charts the corporate and romantic trials of a stylish set of black achievers. Here, The Lost City is but an exaggerated figure of a Success that features luxury cars, designer clothing, and jet set lifestyles. Similarly, The Lost City was the background of choice for the filmed bio-clip of one of South Africa's black entrants in the International Gladiators sports circus: his chosen stage name is Shaka.

Complexly Calling Kerzner: Legendary King of the City

The meaning of 'Kerzner' is as difficult to fix as that of The Lost City. Within the field of entertainment entrepreneurship the local print and televisual media have habitually spotlighted Sol Kerzner as South Africa's own supercapitalist along the lines of Donald Trump, narrativising him according to folklorist myths of heroism and villainy that are vectored into popular conceptions of extraordinary wealth or celebrity more generally. Well before the launch of The Lost City, 'Kerzner' had been rendered a public, if ambiguous South African property, circulated through the photographic representations, personality profiles, interviews and reports of which mass-mediated infotainment is made. He was a three-times married hotel and casino magnate, at that stage the most recent ex-husband of Anneline Kriel (the smalltown girl who rose to and beyond the status of Miss World 1974). Kerzner was sometimes cast as eponymously macho South African male reworked into a modern-day corporate adventurer who traded on the virile energies of colonial hunter-explorer tropes. On occasions this led to representation in which Kerzner was implied to be lacking in taste and in finesse: unable to shed his origins despite having accumulated vast wealth; hopelessly seeking to erase his parochiality through gold bracelets and a tarnished Joburg-American accent. Most often, Kerzner was narrativised in the media as an extravagantly 'visionary' and wealthy resort entrepreneur of lower-middleclass origins; the jet-set acquaintance of movie stars, royalty, local and international politicians. His media status was vectored into that of others, a paradoxical commodification of personality in which famous people are entertainment, and entertainers are famous people and people enjoy fame famously. Even those aspects of his business dealings that might have seemed expedient or perhaps duplicitous worked to make him a nationally familiar public persona. Think, for instance, of newspaper headlines that pointed to Kerzner as the ambitious local hotelier accused of (but never extradited for) bribing Transkei bantustan leader George Matanzima in 1986 so as to secure a gambling monopoly for a company in which he owned an interest. Kerzner appeared before the Harms Commission for this matter. He acknowledged that a payment was made, but insisted that since he paid the money under duress he was the victim of extortion, rather than the instigator of bribery. The matter remains murky, and has been compounded, rather than clarified, by revelations made in Alan Greenblo's biography of Kerzner (1997), and the High Court's decision to ban the book for distribution on the grounds that some of its material is injurious to Kerzner's international ventures, and his personal interests. Other stories circulated in the media were equally provocative: Kerzner is said to have funded the post-inauguration party of president Mandela, as well as functions related to the engagement and wedding of a Mandela daughter. He was alleged to have been asked by Mandela to extend a 'friendly' intervention to help solve the difficulties that the ANC was facing with Zulu Chief Gatsha Buthelezi, leader of the Inkatha Freedom Party. Further, Kerzner was reputed to have made substantial political donations to the South African National Party and to the British Conservative party. Criticism, acclaim, ambivalence: press coverage left no doubt that Kerzner was a Big South African with a newsworthy life, even if some were inclined to consider this commodified production of meaning merely a caricature of meaningful, socially productive agency. As Bill Moses puts it (Moses is billed as "senior analyst with the Investor Responsibility Center in Washington, and expert on South African Business"): Kerzner is "like the Donald Trump of South Africa: larger than life, big dreams, big scandals, lots of TV coverage, lots of column inches devoted to his personal life and his business fortunes" (*Sapa-Reuter Reporter* 1994:19). It is clearly difficult to avoid meeting Kerzner in the media where he is often conjured through a 'supercilious yet super' tone. As Barry Jones remarks, though

storm clouds have dimmed the lustre of the man who came to be known as 'The Sun King', surely no-one will begrudge a word of praise for Sol Kerzner, who visualised the dream and toiled and sweated, cursed and cajoled to make the vision a three-dimensional, gen-new-wine, twenty-four carat, full-frontal reality? (1991:246)

The interest in Kerzner, for many journalists who covered The Lost City launch, seems to have derived in some measure from his ambiguous status: politics and corporate subsidy; entrepreneurial exploitation and escape from the historical moment...what did this mean in and for a new South Africa? How did 'Kerzner' – much like the chimerical capital of Harvey's global casino economy (1989) – function as an empty signifier, a conduit, as it were, through which highly contradictory cultural meanings were being channelled? Not surprisingly, questions were more prominent than answers, since the extent to which we understand The Lost City and Kerzner as signifiers in a master narrative – of Capitalist expedience, for instance, and neocolonialism – will depend on the degree to which we, ourselves, prefer to seek out coherent connections between tropes, or to regard them as elusively – and alluringly – proliferating. With the launch, the uncovering of 'Kerzner' in the media became particularly frenzied. Kerzner was interviewed, photographed, televised, printed, reprinted, imprinted. Kerzner's representation and name were invoked to signify the scale and glamour, or the moral paucity and kitsch, of the resort environment. In many cases, The Lost City was touted as "Kerzner's Kingdom" – the gigantic home of the giant, a marvellous-monstrous figure of folklore in our times: "at R800-million the biggest resort Africa has ever known and one of the largest in the world" (Barritt 1993:61,62). According to Rich Mkhondo, Kerzner "controls a \$1-billion gambling and hotel empire that includes 33 hotels and 21 casinos in 10 countries" (1996:2). It is the 'Kerzner brand', however significant the contributions to The Lost City of Wimberley Allison Tong and Goo, resort designers of international repute, which has become highly visible. Understandably, then, it is Kerzner, living embodiment of the brand, who is repeatedly inviting of de- and re-mythologisation.

Sometimes, in the barrage of press on The Lost City, both Kerzner and Sun International were downplayed as the imputed authors of the resort and, instead, emphasis was placed on *South Africa* as a newly authoritative cultural site. The implication seems to have been that 'South Africa' was now becoming a leading leisure location, a novel role that was tied both to the glamour and the morality of a reinvented South African national narrative as it was being recast since Mandela's release. The narrative of the 'new nation' entailed 'rewriting' the previously dominant story of apartheid, racism, sanctions, and international exclusion, substituting for this metaphors of birth, emergence, freshness, discovery and 'true', no longer deviant subjectivity. As I have already said in discussing The Lost City in relation to the exhibition of national identity, the publicising of The Lost City coincided with the celebrated demise of apartheid, and attempts by the new South African government to 'advertise' the democratic republic to an international audience. A not insubstantial facet of this marketing was South Africa's economic prominence on the continent, and a belief in its ability to generate the scales of revenue and exchange needed in order to give 'Africa' the appearance of social stability. The brand identity associated with The Lost City, then, was sometimes figured not only as Kerzner's, but as a 'potent' South African trademark that was iconographic of *the* new South Africa more broadly.

With the building of The Lost City, Kerzner and his monumental entrepreneurial method could even be said to have become an internationally-recognisable 'brand' of leisure-entertainment, whether one wishes to interpret this branding as stigmatised or as lauded product identity. To a local, especially white South African audience, Kerzner was familiar as the developer behind South Africa's first five-star hotel, The Beverley Hills in Umhlanga Rocks near

Durban, and a string of Sun International hotels in the Indian Ocean. It was also popularly known that his international ambitions in the hotel and leisure industry had been curtailed on account of South Africa's pariah status during the 1970s and 1980s. In the late 1980s, though, Kerzner achieved a more international reputation. The planning of The Lost City project capitalised on Kerzner's anticipation of South Africa's impending international cachet, and made his flamboyant style even more visible. It was on the perceived strengths of The Lost City, for example, that Kerzner was asked by the then-Israeli government to consider developing a Biblical theme park on the scale and in the style of The Lost City; he has also proceeded to expand his interests into the Bahamas, through themed resort ventures such as Atlantis, Paradise Island, a \$250-million project on Nassau. His hyperbolic imagination and financial clout were also sought by representatives of the North American Mohegans in their plans to develop 97ha of a Connecticut reservation as a casino and entertainment complex which they hope will revive the tribe's economic prospects. This has been the case with a similar development by the Mashantucket Pequot tribe, which is said to be North America's most profitable gambling venture. (Before we rant about the evils of gambling, by the way, we might be interested to hear that part of the built structure to be used in the eastern Connecticut development included a vast factory where nuclear reactor components were built.) Although the Mohegan development had been dogged by controversy which stemmed from Kerzner's previous relations with Matanzima, Kerzner was eventually cleared of any criminal intent and granted a casino licence. The \$275-million (R1245-million) Mohegan Sun opened in October 1996 in Uncasville, about two hours' drive from New York. Kerzner's reputation as 'Sun King' has thus enjoyed another dramatic, international staging. It was precisely Kerzner's audacious panache which the Mohegans were seeking, and the entertainment complex was designed as

a monument to a tribe that is said to have lived centuries ago without money or private property. It will be in the shape of a wigwam with a river running through the food court, faux animal skins hanging from the rafters and slot machine games like "Cash Canoe" and "Mohegan Money Tree".

An indoor forest is being built out of logs, steel and aluminium beams. A replica of a sacred cliff, where the great sachem Uncas is said to have leaped across a river, is being created in fibreglass. The 'makiawisug', the little people who the Mohegans believe walk between the natural and the spiritual worlds, will be incorporated. (Rabinowitz 1996:15)

Even were we able to put aside historical questions concerning the 'trail of tears' that characterises North America's treatment of indigenous Americans, the design description of this resort is easily susceptible to criticisms, which range from cultural expedience to downright banality. Given the mythologising impulse that informs the opening phrase of the quotation, we might even query from Kerzner how long he intends to recycle around the globe locally-inflected variants of histories premised on 'the lost people'. And that asked, we would not even have begun to debate the superlative cultural authenticity (I ask you) of games with names such as "Cash Canoe". Still, considered within the larger framework of extremely popular themed leisure and, indeed, glancing toward Martin Hall's desire to see resort design that bears far more closely on the deep cultural structures of the community in which the tourist development is to occur (1995), we cannot altogether scorn the venture. In it, what some might designate the degraded self-signature of a Kerzner brand is actively sought out by a colonised, degraded people in their will to cultural-political renewal. 'Kerzner' becomes the curious conduit for an Other's cultural aspirations that draw on an idealised past and projected dreams of future greatness. If the artificial, the replica and the manufactured undoubtedly prevail in the Mohegan project over any possibility of an unmediated relation with a lost past, we cannot disallow the possibility that they enable people to 'model' cultural behaviours to which they have little or no access in other forms of contemporary commodified life. Indeed, the vice-chair of the 1100-member tribe eulogised by

James Fennimore Cooper in *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) declared during celebrations prefatory to the building of the complex that the “dying days are done. The cycle of life has begun anew”. She spoke above a booming drumbeat to which danced Mohegan Indians clad in buckskin and feathers. “Their chief sprinkled tobacco on the ground in a ritual tribute to the spirits, and then joined tribe members in smoking the ancient pipe on the graves of their ancestors” (Rabinowitz 1996:15). Marketing exercise or meaningful cultural ceremony? You tell me. Wicomb and Press, Nava and De Certeau: if we recall the differential emphases which these sets of cultural critics place on spectacular production and the minuscule productions of meaning that are associated with commodity consumption, it is clear that the issue is likely to remain unresolved.¹²

What I am suggesting, in all of this, is that the signification of Kerzner is expansive, rather than ideologically obvious. If some would prefer to argue that Kerzner, morally-speaking, is a ‘black hole’ (since in creating a bantustan entertainment empire he took advantage of the ‘black spots’ of South Africa’s fearful sublime in which trade was not subject to ‘normal’ regulation), it is equally possible to maintain that Kerzner, considered semiotically, is a conceptual lacuna able to be filled with any number of meanings. Despite the rhetorical-disciplinary work done by tropes of archaeology and adventure in the official Sun International media material which proliferated for the launch, for instance, the legend of The Lost City was not the only ‘story’ read by a public in making meaning of the resort. In other words, the legend, with its characterisation of Kerzner as visionary archaeological custodian, could not be ‘authorised’ by corporate *fiat* or by advertising *agency*, but only through people’s rewriting of the story into forms that suited them.

This rewriting entails infinite (and infinitely odd) permutations of criticism and envy, mockery and admiration. The tongue-in-cheek response is the easiest to recognise, as in the case where the ‘legend’ of The Lost City is recast as ‘whispered’ “[f]olklore of the marketing kind” which could

more accurately...[be] described as Sol Kerzner’s greatest pipe dream....

It is Kerzner himself who – for generations who hopefully will not remain ‘lost’ themselves – will one day be the legend. ‘A long time ago during the days when South African banks had credit to give a small but charismatic man, this man took the money and built an enormous pleasure city in a place named Bophuthatswana...’ the oral tradition will note. (*Cosmopolitan* Journalist 1992:179)

This example is characteristic of an ironising impulse in that it extends The Lost City’s ‘legendary’ narrative to Kerzner himself, and also destabilises the adjective ‘lost’, reminding the reader that newfound leisure-entertainment follies aside, South Africa has a generation of young black people who, through lack of education, access to other infrastructure and even hope for the future, are in danger of becoming a ‘lost’ humanity. For purposes of interrogation rather than corroboration, the account also mimics the fabulaic modes of orality implicit in the epic structure of feeling that would value ‘legend’ as a form of knowledge, and it extends the trope of loss and lost cities to the struggling South African economy.

Similar is Fedler’s cartoon. (See Figure 5.vii.) Here, Kerzner is a sloganeering figure dwarfed by the monumental legacy (economic and cultural) of capitalist apartheid. Gold mining infrastructure, commercial centre, telecommunications tower, Voortrekker Monument, a stereotypical beauty queen who looms over moral and social chaos like a surprised King Kong, AK 47 and ethnic weaponry: the caricature awkwardly situates Kerzner in a context that writes spectacles like The Lost City out of a feasible South African future story even as it implies Kerzner’s complicity in authoring such an apocalyptic narrative. There is also Barry Ronge’s spoof “Turning a liability into an a\$\$et” where he enters the debate about the future purpose of Robben Island, notorious former prison. He proposes a solution

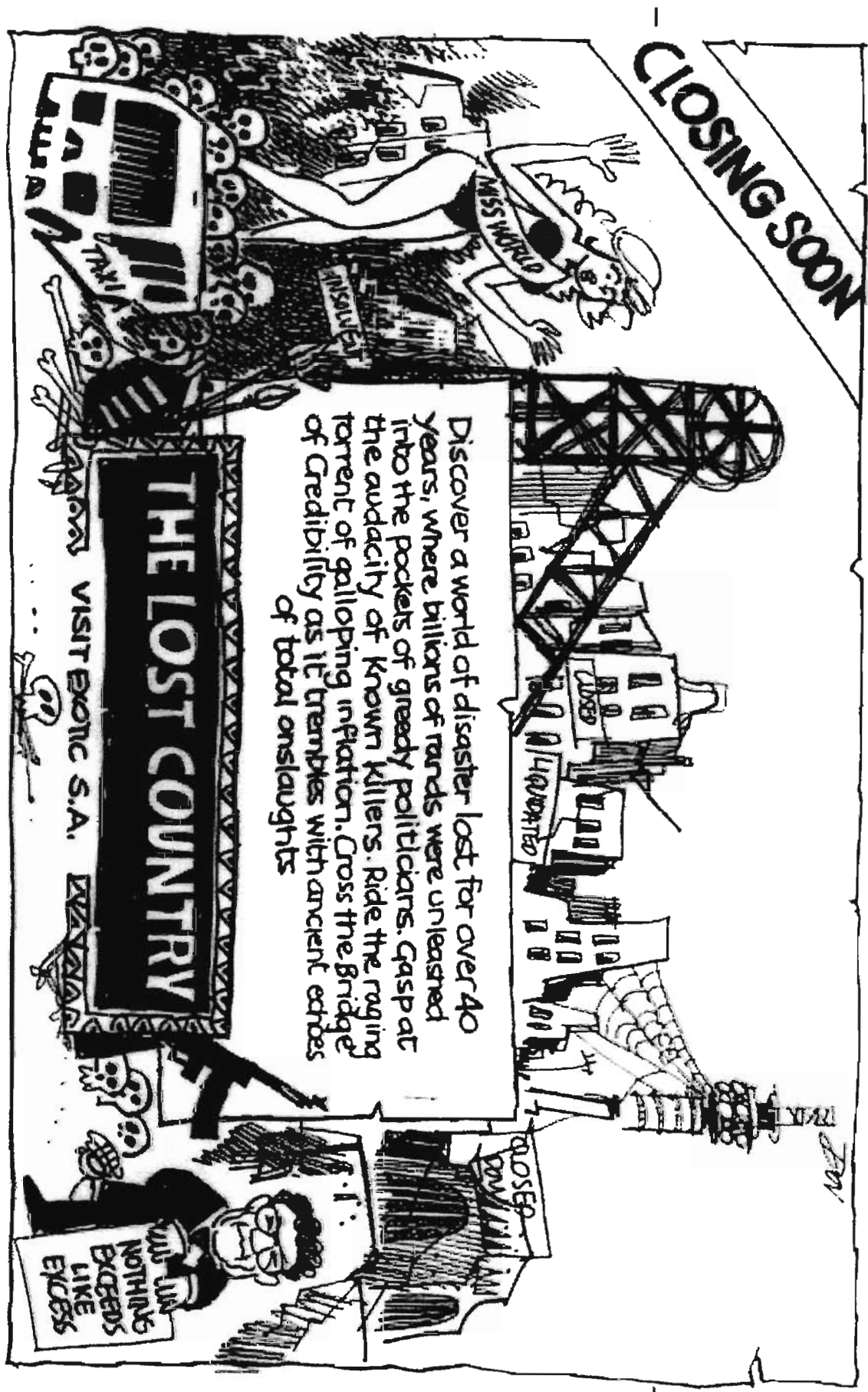


Figure 5.vii

which should appease the government's desire to turn it into a commercially-viable tourist site and the ANC's desire to make it a politically-correct shrine of remembrance. Create a history park to explain how we got where we are today.

Take a leaf from Sol Kerzner's book and create a fabulous myth about two ancient and warring tribes – one white, one black – who trod the African soil and collaborated for a brief moment to create a breathtaking luxury hotel called... The Lost Economy.

Build it with soaring turrets as high as inflation rates, finish it with architectural details as intricate and involved as the schemes by which politicians grew rich...

One could enter The Lost Economy across the Bridge of Changing Times, on which the rock faces of apartheid's ancient gods look down on the river Rubicon in which a powerful wizard called Botha made a nation's future vanish. Call it South Africaland, a fantasy pleasure world resembling Disneyland, not run by a jovial mouse, however, but by assorted rats.

From there we pass into the Valley of the Waves of Unrest... (1993:8)

And so Ronge continues. He manages to convey the irony of a lavish resort such as that commissioned by Kerzner in a southern Africa of the early 1990s, and suggests the South African metanarratives which impinge on the official legend: most obviously, he points to the plots and potboiling of apartheid, which made South Africa into a country at once mickey mouse and monstrous. But his 'history park' is also shaped, implicitly, by yet more stories: the labour relations trouble which plagued Sun International when it reallocated workers within the Sun International group soon after the opening of The Lost City, for instance; the egotistical recalcitrance of Bophuthatswana's Lucas Mangope about rejoining South Africa, and the failed, violent attempt of the ultraright AWB (Afrikaner Weerstand Beweeging) to seize Bophuthatswana as an Afrikaner homeland. Ronge's themed representation of South Africa's national story through the figure of loss not only imputes a craziness to The Lost City. This is virtually a given. Equally as telling, is his toying with the perversely apposite craziness of a Kerzner Kingdom in relation to a South African reality that has in many respects become an imago of fantastic dimensions. The theoretical lineage of such satirical humour is perhaps traceable to Jean Baudrillard, even though Baudrillard's critique of commodified life is fundamentally more pessimistic. He claims that the "objective profile of the United States... may be traced throughout Disneyland"; Disneyland is a

digest of the American way of life, panegyric to American values, idealised transposition of a contradictory reality. To be sure. But this conceals something else, and that 'ideological' blanket exactly serves to cover over a *third-order simulation*: Disneyland is there to conceal the fact that it is the 'real' country, all of 'real' America, which is Disneyland... Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real. (1992:154)

He continues, focussing especially on the immediate vicinity of Los Angeles:

Moreover, Disneyland is not the only one. Enchanted Village, Magic Mountain, Marine World: Los Angeles is encircled by these 'imaginary stations' which feed reality, reality-energy, to a town whose mystery is precisely that it is nothing more than a network of endless, unreal circulation: a town of fabulous proportions, but without space or dimension. As much as electrical and nuclear power stations, as much as film studios, this town, which is nothing more than an immense script and a perpetual motion picture, needs the old imaginary made up of childhood signals and faked phantasms for its sympathetic nervous system. (1992:154)

Kerzner as a Site for Popular Exploration

Ronge, thank goodness, creatively adulterates Baudrillard's theoretically cryptic nihilism. Ronge's witty response to the 'hyperreality' of contemporary South African life, subtly informed by theory despite appearing in a popular journalistic context, is probably on the generous side when set against the responses of many serious intellectuals. He illustrates something of a conceptually playful, carnivalesque attitude to tourist sites like The Lost City that the academic might be inclined to disregard in emphasising the power of the official narratives through which

the resort was publicised. Significantly, though, a critic's unwillingness to work beyond the parameters of the official story also denies creative agency to the audience.

In making sense of Sol's role in the marketing of *The Lost City*, I suggest, we must allow that there are unstable energies at work. The centrifugal narratives of marketing and promotional strategy attempt to manage, control and codify meaning so as to produce an attractive, persuasive logic for the consumption of *The Lost City* as a product; yet these inevitably work in relation to the centripetalising semiosis characteristic of consumption, in which members of an audience do not linearly consume an advertising representation, or the goods/services for which it is a figure, or the ideology which underwrites advertising itself as a form. Instead, they have recourse to a more eclectically intertextual, often haphazard repertoire of sensory and sense-making tactics. Kerzner is in many respects an heir of P.T. Barnum, the familiar circus entrepreneur and showman. Rather than merely trading in bunkum, Barnum may be said to have foregrounded the subtle interrelationships that exist between the author and the receiver of cultural communications. He was a precursor of the public relations agent, involved in the manufacture of celebrity and in training an audience in the *business* of taking *pleasure* in recognising the commodification of personality. Barnum's "subjects were superlatives – the best, the strangest, the biggest, the only", and they were made exceptional through image management (Gamson 1992:4). Like Kerzner, who takes on the role of the archaeologist for the media-medley that is *The Lost City* launch, Barnum was not only promoting performers in his circus, "he was publicly performing the promotion", an activity which involved "playing with reality more than definitively marking it off....Shuttling his audience between knowing the tricks and believing the illusions". Instead of hiding behind a sinisterly manipulative front, Barnum "brought publicity mechanisms and questions of artifice to the forefront" (Gamson 1992:4). In doing so, we could argue, he released the audience into productive forms of cultural agency even as he wished to persuade them to consume the preferred meanings that he had placed in circulation.

In people's processing of the media material on *The Lost City*, for example, the trope of heroic archaeologist was not necessarily understood as a rhetorical technology which *naturalised* meaning, but as a device whose recognisably figurative nature required it to be deconstructed – perhaps in forms that involved a playing with human beings' desires to imagine themselves as important, awe-inspiring figures ('Star for a Day'), and as charismatic people who have dramatic adventures rather than merely holidays or 'day-trips'. As Jack Nachbar and Kevin Laue remark in a section on popular heroes that appears within their cultural studies textbook for North American undergraduates, many

of us live within huge social structures that seem to make us anonymous. We sit in classrooms with hundreds of other students who dress just like us. Later we may work for a huge corporation where, once again, everybody dresses just the same and only our immediate superior knows what we do. In this kind of environment we naturally cry out to be known, to be noticed. Under these circumstances, celebrities become heroic. They are recognised for the very magnification of their personalities. Stars have achieved the personal recognition we all crave. Teddy Kennedy may be little more than an alcoholic lout in the pages of *The National Enquirer*, but at least we all know his name and for that he has our grudging admiration. (1992:328-329)

The simplicity of this explanation might be thought wanting by the theoretician or philosopher, but it successfully conveys something of the pathos that might inform the meanings which people attach to commoditised figures. The quotation certainly goes part of the way, for instance, towards explaining how a figure such as Kerzner may become the object of fantasy and wishfulfilment for people who long to be discovered, or long to discover about themselves something that will elevate them from the ordinary to the celebrated extraordinary. The ordinary and the spectacular, as I have explicitly discussed in Chapter 1 in relation to Ndebele's work, are by no means

diametrically opposite 'moral' poles. Members of an implied audience may also have discovered The Lost City for themselves partly by searching out 'Kerzner' as a person, despite intellectual scepticism surrounding the cult of mystery and personality that characterises the popular media's representation of celebrity. While some of the material that released The Lost City into public view took the form of press release – in other words, it was yet another *official* apparatus in Sun International's Lost City promotion – journalists also capitalised on the launch by fashioning 'news' and 'human interest' stories through the excavation and re/deconstruction of Kerzner's 'life story'. Part of their pleasure in these encodings, and our own, lies perhaps in the recognition of the heroic/anti-heroic modes informing the journalist's style. We anticipate the familiar storyline, metaphors and images; and we congratulate ourselves on being 'in the know' about prominent social figures. Co-existent with the Sun International Lost City legend in the media, then, was a welter of visual and printed 'Kerznerclippings' from media sources not coherently controlled by a single, self-interested agent. These comprised a bank of stories and images of Kerzner which people could piece together or tear apart in creating their own narratives of The Lost City and its supposed custodian. This may have entailed degrees of analytical criticism that intellectuals would be inclined to look on favourably as forms of critical agency which lead to the tearing away of the veil of false consciousness; but it might also have been less systematic and cogent, informed by such contradictory impulses as disbelief, laughter, mockery, curiosity, gossip, and longing. In the late-twentieth-century fascination with celebrity, as Gamson explains, there is evident an "ironic, winking tone", a "revelatory" metatext which gives the lie to ideas of mere audience manipulation and deception. "The audience has been invited to take its power further with a new cynical distance from the production of celebrity and celebrity images" (1992:17). This process is unlikely to be as straightforward as those cultural commentators who revile the duplicity of a culture industry are wont to maintain. Even cynicism, for instance, need not entail an exclusively critical trajectory. An individual might disbelievably rework the code of family man that is often invoked to bolster Kerzner's image of corporate success, asking: what about hinted allegations, here, of violence against spouses? And what about scratching beyond the surface of proud fatherhood (to a ballet-dancing, model-beauty youngest daughter and a prestigiously degreed, internationally successful son), to probe the depths of dysfunctional family relations suggested by Kerzner's fatherhood to a substance-abusing daughter? Readers of 'the Kerzner story' might well ask such awkward questions. (The hyphenated adjectival phrases in the preceding sentence draw attention to the difficulties of description; disallowing simple conventions of authority and accuracy.) Yet even in being subjected to popular, 'national inquiry', it remains possible that the publicised domestic difficulties which Kerzner has faced may serve to situate him within some people's minds as a figure who, like themselves, is human despite his mogul status. Similarly, critique of the man's larger-than-life reputation need not preclude the taking of pleasure vicariously through the exaggerated experiential narratives to which his wealth and demonstrable achievement give him access. As Gamson might observe of Kerzner, his ambiguous meanings are reinforced by the fact that on the one hand he embodies the meaning of fame that is derived from "manifest deeds": his visibility is linked to remarkable achievements; they are considered worthy of wide remark. Yet on the other, Kerzner's fame is attributable to the workings of a commodified structure of celebrity feeling that has the capacity to grant otherwise unknown figures their fifteen minutes of world fame (1992:1). In other words, Kerzner transgresses binary patterns of explanation; his is at once a meritocratic and a democratic fame. He is extraordinary, the result of a manufactured attention that is claimed by elites through their ability to control the dissemination of meanings about themselves; yet his story distils something

of the quotidian and an element of election to stardom by virtue of popular interest. The meanings attributed to Kerzner, then, are difficult to fix.

Here is a simple example of the kind of semiotic reference and deferral which I am discussing: an article on Kerzner cover-lined "The Man with Golden Balls" and published in *Cosmopolitan's* 1992 *CosmoMan* supplement. Let me start with the cover headline which advertises the feature, since it gives weight to the points I make subsequently concerning the relentless intertextuality and instability of 'Kerzner' as an overdetermined signifier. "The Man with Golden Balls" may most immediately refer to Kerzner's habit of carrying gold worry beads in lieu of a three-pack a day smoking habit, but it also connotes something of the man's popularly-imagined 'magical' capability: he has been 'transformed' from working class poverty into a multimillionaire and, as Martin Hall wryly remarks, he is himself widely figured in the media as an alchemist, "someone who can bring water to the dry land of the Northern Transvaal, someone who can turn an age-old dream [of Africa's lost cities] into hard cash" (1995:199). Further, as the actual magazine article on Kerzner introduced by the cover-line would have it, the man possesses "an overwhelming physicality and magnetic appeal", and "a raw sexuality that is irresistible" (1992:226). Perhaps. Certainly, these are the sections of the article that Martin Hall chooses to quote in revealing the obvious tropes of masculine adventure romance through which Kerzner is constructed in the media.¹³ But placed more explicitly in the context of the article from which the comments are taken, we are left with a more intriguing picture: Kerzner's "craggy face and roly-poly body are not the trappings of a sex symbol", and nor does his interest derive overtly from the charismatic power of cash. As Burton remarks, "Perhaps the crux of Sol Kerzner's appeal is his capacity to be uncouth: 'I never wear any aftershave,' he once boasted, 'you can ask Annie if you don't believe me'" (Burton 1992:226). If Kerzner intends to project himself here as the man's man, rather than as an effeminate cologne king, the anxiety informing this statement also has a bathetically human appeal. His claim, from a man whose earnings we might imagine place him beyond the reach of ordinary human insecurity and need for validation, is a comi-serious nod to conventional cultural codes of masculinity that unwittingly extends even beyond Haggard's gentle mockery of a lily-white Good as he meticulously attempts to perform his gentlemanly European toilette in the bush. The supposed neo-imperialist Kerzner, here, in de-/referring to his famous ex-wife's authority, at once confirms machismo and refutes the niceties of a refined, Cultured norm that has been set up for the Nineties Man as a desirable standard by the Taste Police.

In relation to points such as I have been elaborating, the cover-line of Burton's article on Kerzner, "The Man with the Golden Balls", is clearly available for multiple interpretations. In the article itself, we find the journalist explicitly attempting to gloss Kerzner through uniqueness and comparison, an unstable rhetorical ploy which corroborates the difficulty of merely reading off from the name 'Kerzner' an ideology synonymous with exploitation. Burton suggests that Kerzner's

life-story has the makings of a Hollywood hit...perhaps a glossy sequel to *Bugsy*. Shakespeare might have portrayed him as a tragic hero. But if I were to decide where the swashbuckling and shady antics of South Africa's controversial Sun King should be chronicled, I'd vote for a Wilbur Smith blockbuster. (1992:223)

Obviously, this comment constructs Kerzner in terms of heroic manhood. More noteworthy in the journalist's inculcating of the hero, however, is her need to range through an historically and generically eclectic medley of 'outstanding masculinity' in her search for a Kerzner analogue before 'settling' on Wilbur Smith's heroes as the most apposite frame of reference. Yet just as this signifying of Sol *places* Kerzner as exceptional, the language simultaneously *displaces* him to any

number of centuries, situations, styles, figures. The comment is rapaciously intertextual, attributing uniqueness even as this can only be conveyed through the contradictory rhetorical tactic of analogy. The photograph which accompanies the article further complicates the naming of Kerzner, in that the monumental stance and close-up camera angle seem purposefully to configure Kerzner as a visionary nationbuilder in the manner of Cecil Rhodes. Yet the way in which the photographic analogy is 'meant' to be read is not inherent in the image. Let me spend some time on this: is the visual comparison valorising or parodying? Does it work to construct Kerzner univalently or ambiguously? As any revisionist historian knows, Rhodes is a prime southern African colonial target. In associating Rhodes with particular forms of architectural vision Chipkin stresses, for example, that Rhodes's "view to the north combined powerful symbolism with attributions of proprietary rights – an African interior to be settled like America with pasture lands and homesteads, with English-speaking cities possessing streets and lanes lined with solid burgher houses, as well as civic monuments and splendid mansions reflecting the powerful presence of a rich new patrician class in Africa" (1993:31). Similarly, in discussing the political work performed by a romanticised archaeology Martin Hall (1995) remarks on Rhodes's overt involvement in the ruins of Great Zimbabwe, which had recently been brought into public view by both Mauch's so-called discovery of the site in 1871, and by Rider Haggard's novelisation of the location in *King Solomon's Mines* (1885). In 1890, Mashonaland was occupied by Cecil Rhodes's "British South Africa Company, with the result that the 'Lost City' of Great Zimbabwe became an Imperial possession. Rhodes became obsessed with the place, acquiring Mauch's finds and equipping expeditions to dig for evidence" (1995:188). Hall continues: "Stories of Great Zimbabwe's artefacts got around quickly, and Rhodes moved to turn antiquarianism to profit, promoting Rhodesia Ancient Ruins Ltd as a company with exclusive rights to work the sites for treasures" (1995:189). Given the historical record, the photographic analogy between Rhodes and Kerzner could be read critically so as to deconstruct Kerzner's ostensible visionary status. Nevertheless, when it comes to decoding the photograph of Kerzner, we may not have the historical knowledge necessary in order to relate Kerzner to Rhodes through the great detail that might lead us to create analogies between what Hall rightly calls a late-nineteenth-century "licensed depredation" (1995:189) of Africa and Kerzner's empire-building activities in Bophuthatswana. Perhaps we are not even able to read the intertextual reference to Rhodes's statue implied in the photographer's chosen pose for Kerzner, thus being prevented from correlating the men's hubristic visions of empires stretching respectively from Cape to Cairo, and South Africa to the United States and the Caribbean. (In fact, *within* the pages of the *CosmoMan* supplement, the article bears the title "Prophet of the City", which many readers might have glossed as intertextual with a rap group of similar designation.) Indeed, all we might feel is that the image announces Kerzner as a Great Man with an ego and energy of matching dimensions. Curiously, Kerzner's posture in the image so selfconsciously invites readers of the article to reach this conclusion that it is difficult not to wonder at the degree of good-humoured personal mockery that he is permitting. Considered in this way, the pose is not exclusively that of Rhodes, or of the big man playing God: it is a stance that also belongs to any number of cinematic cowboys and urban frontiersmen as they gaze, human yet momentarily immobile as the statues through which some of them were subsequently celebrated, across 'their' land; imposing imposters. In another photograph which appeared in the *Sunday Times* of 4 October 1992, Kerzner posed as Indiana Jones. The caption to this picture declares, "Indiana Sol and the Lost City of Bop". In both of these examples, the resonances remain those of imperial-colonial endeavour, but they are more labyrinthine than any unitary ideological inscription. What we might allow is that whatever its intertextuality, the image is a representation of Kerzner; it must be said in some sense

to depict Kerzner, if even Kerzner as Kerzner would prefer to imagine himself: man of vision, man of the earth; Big Man and little guy. His gaze is into the far blue yonder, but the camera captures the wrinkles and the 'beer belly', the pugnacious face and the impatience of a figure with hands jammed into the pockets of crumpled khaki work gear. The image forfeits the idealising gigantism of the monumental representation. (Although this particular photograph is not situated in relation to the hyperbole of The Lost City landscape and interiors, photojournalists are also often given to draw attention to the apparent contradictions between Kerzner 'the bloke' and the spectacular scale and finish of The Lost City.) The imperialism of Kerzner, then, is actually and ideologically circuitous; Kerzner constitutes an ambiguous African entrepreneurial energy that is exploitative and ameliorative. Many media pieces, for instance, impute to Kerzner a capitalist vision which metaphorically 'exploits' opportunities, rather than being synonymous with imperialism's literal exploitation of people or countries. This may be an expedient or misguided displacement of political economy into the softer transfigurations of the figurative, but even here, it can convey an ambivalent attitude to the grand scale and manner of Kerzner's empire building. In an imaginative report on the Miss World contest being staged at The Lost City, by way of example, Jack Shepherd Smith invents a conversation with Kerzner, "fighting the urge to call him by his full title, Sun King of All the Slots", and has Kerzner declaim his ambition to engage in a postmodern colonisation of outer space with an 'out-of-this-world' Space City complex:

'I've already had preliminary talks with the American Space Administration boys and we're going to have this giant Space City Casino orbiting up there, and we'll beam up a thousand beauty queens and 20 000 special guests, each with his own personalised one-armed bandit and, man, I tell you, it will be out of this world. I think we'll have a special World Holiday named for the opening ceremony. All Sols Day.' (1992:5)

Of course this is mockery: I hardly need detail the ironic tone which parodies the gigantism through which The Lost City was actually publicised. Yet whatever the journalist's intention, the energy he puts into conceiving this fictional scenario also pays grudging tribute to Kerzner's apparently boundless drive and extravagant ambitions. Does this cocky little man with his insistently predictable narratives not know human limitations? And perhaps equally as importantly, does he not acknowledge the implicit constraints placed upon South African financial and imaginative power in a world of leisure and entertainment which is so thoroughly managed by the technology 'boys' of the United States?

Barritt's is another piece of popular journalism which cleverly capitalises on consumer interest in Kerzner by representing the man as a site for exploration:

Gentle reader, welcome to SolKerznerworld, a mix of fabulous riches, exotic destinations and visionary dreams with just a touch of poignancy. Our host on this magical mystery tour is none other than Sol Kerzner himself – 57 years old, richer than anyone imagines, still dreaming, still scheming, still crazy after all these years. (1993:62)

In this article, readers are invited to perform a popular cultural archaeology on the famous individual 'Sol Kerzner'. Through the circuitous cultural relations implied even in the cross referencing to popular song which is evident in the short quotation given above, readers are to unearth 'his story', creating-cum-restoring it in the process; they are inventively to map its nadirs and zeniths, its ordinarinesses and extraordinarinesses; they are to establish analogies and differences with their own lives; to find the treasures and dig the dirt (gossipy snippets, jokey ridicule, sincere sympathy, catty envy, dreamlike aspiration – a welter of ostensibly contradictory possibilities). The legendary, famous figure becomes as much a site for cultural interpretation and narrativisation as does the resort site that he supposedly authorises. This ambiguous potential is part of the commodified package of celebrity. In their discussion of what they call citizen-heroes and rogue-heroes within the field of North American popular culture, for instance, Nachbar and

Lause point out that the cultural functions performed by these figures, who may be real or imaginary, often overlap. They may embody the 'traditional' social myths and aspirations of the socially-dominant section of the nation or the community *and*, paradoxically, they may represent challenges to what is approved, foregrounding the energies, beliefs and values associated with individualism. In other words, many heroes serve as 'heroic mediators' in that they "simultaneously embody conflicting or even contradictory beliefs and values" (1992:321). It is hardly surprising, then, that the celebrities whose individuality is iconised in the texts of commodity culture are chimerical rather than the one-dimensional products of a capitalist culture industry.

When it comes to reading Sol Kerzner as prominent media personage, it would be foolish to imagine that 'Kerzner' has quite the cultural cachet of, say, 'Mandela', but he is nevertheless a powerful South African signifier and a powerful signifier of South Africa beyond the country's borders. For some readers of his life story, indeed, Kerzner – like Mandela – seems to have been an inspirational figure in moving South Africa from under the shadow of apartheid to the longed-for status of 'international player'. For example, Kerzner was rated in a survey of 'South African women' 6,5 out of 10 as a role model in a *Sunday Times* 'Women Talk' questionnaire: third after FW de Klerk (8,1) and Nelson Mandela (8,0) (*Sunday Times Magazine* 1994b:9). While I do not wish, here, to debate the specifically gendered apparatus of the magazine quiz, Kerzner's profile in the South African media, certainly, has on occasions been as prominent as those of the country's leading politicians. At the time of *The Lost City* launch, *Mail & Guardian* writer and *Femina* columnist Charlotte Bauer (1992) was provocative enough to suggest that since Kerzner had managed to fashion fantasy into reality, perhaps he could teach the embattled Zulu leader Chief Gatsha Buthelezi a thing or two about turning reality into fantasy, helping to make his political nightmares disappear.

As this Chapter should be making clear, 'Kerzner' is but one aspect of a much larger story about (South African) commodity culture. Let me pursue the matter of Kerzner's multiple signification by referring to the comments of newspaper journalist Richard McNeill, who during the launch of *The Lost City* found the prevailing interest in the latest brand of Kerzner Culture absurd. He cites especially "Kerzner: the Man and His Vision", which he understands to be a sycophantic audiovisual-advertorial produced for Sun International by Paul Zwick, bought by the South African Broadcasting Corporation and screened in conjunction with the launch of *The Lost City*. (The so-called documentary, like so much about Kerzner, was admittedly the subject of controversy. It was ridiculed by some journalists as a fawning 'snow-job'.) About the documentary, McNeill sniffs bathetically that against a background of Picassos and Henry Moores: "Gillian van Houten and a camera team seemed to have followed Sol to England, Las Vegas, the Cote d'Azur and Hout Bay, a trip which produced plenty of pictures of his lavish homes but few insights" (1992:14). McNeill derides the vicarious and spectacular consumption of place and person that is armchair tourism. He recoils at the surface representation of the evident, the lavish visuality of "plenty of pictures". He longs for something more, something deeper. Paradoxically, though, this express wish for 'insights' only helps to validate the idea of personality, rather than to diminish it, whereas a diminution by means of mockery seems to have been part of McNeill's intention. Without appearing to realise it, McNeill is himself produced by a structure of feeling in which celebrity is assumed to have cultural significance.¹⁴

Even without insights, it is highly probable that the emotional logic of what a media audience took to be Sol's already *familiar* 'personality' – gleaned from other media on other occasions – would have contributed to the appeal of the programme. Fenster plays on this in her feature on Kerzner for the 'People' section of *Fair Lady*, claiming that during

the last few years, hotel magnate Sol Kerzner has become increasingly reclusive and increasingly mythologised. He grants brief press interviews only when another fantastic project requires the publicity, and even then all personal questions are strenuously avoided. PNINA FENSTER spent three days trailing the man whose idea of a good time is a five-hour building inspection. She returned sunburnt and exhausted, but just that much closer. (1992:67)

Comments such as these fulfil an equivocal purpose: in part, they contribute to precisely the aura of mystery and personal mystique to which the writer is seeking access, thereby performing a rhetorical genuflection before the star figure as an exceptional being; at the same time, though, they also use innuendo and irony to render the extraordinary more quotidian, or even less than what a mass audience might expect. (The gentle satire, in this particular quotation, is clearly of Sol's 'failure' to meet sanctioned standards of male conduct towards a woman, whether through gentlemanly or more virile codes.) As Gamson remarks, one of the effects of television upon people's experience of the world has been a 'down-sizing', a lessening of scale in keeping with the intimate domestic situation in which television is generally viewed. This correlates with people's relationship to stardom and celebrity in making the heroic stature more ordinary; it brings famous people into the context of the home in what we could call a psychically manageable scale and thereby heightens the illusion of intimacy that is celebrity personality. If stardom inflates the human being to gigantic proportions, both the technology and ephemerality of television and print media propose (and sometimes effect) a visual form of diminution, rendering the gigantic miniature by virtue of its momentary visual and conceptual status. The attraction of Kerzner, in such an experiential context, may be variously utopian, heterotopian, dystopian or a combination of these positions, and is likely to reside in viewers' curious knowledge concerning the ways in which Kerzner's exceptional wealth facilitated both his hyperbolic accrual of socially-sanctioned elite cultural capital (exclusive property, luxury yachts, rare artworks) as well as the transgressing of the social codes and proprieties which are associated with traditional old money. Kerzner's status is all-the-more alluring for some, it might be said, because it stakes the claim of the ordinary against the privileged gentility of 'Men's Clubs' and the old-school-tie. Kerzner's visibility as a South African 'entertainment pioneer' carries with it differentiated encodings in those sociocultural contexts where entertainment is imagined to be inferior to more serious economic capitals – especially those forms of showbusiness which are closer to the hype of the circus, the game show and the theme park than to serious respectable theatre. In this respect, Kerzner's brand of culture has interesting analogies with the outward signs of upward social mobility often adopted by members of a middle class on the move. The matter is one of gentility in relation to a gazumphed gentrification. Consider Nikolaus Pevsner's remarks about new entrepreneurial rather than old traditional money in the nineteenth century, where

the iron-master and mill-owner, as a rule self-made men of no education, felt no longer bound by one particular accepted taste as the gentleman had been who was brought up to believe in the rule of taste.... The new manufacturer had no manners, and he was a convinced individualist. If, for whatever reasons, he liked a style in architecture, then there was nothing to prevent him from having his way and getting a house or a factory or an office building or a club built in that style. (1970:376)

How often have we read in the pages of the press, for instance, that Kerzner, while a Chartered Accountant by profession, is also a Bez Valley Boy and erstwhile boxing champion who still bears the scars of his confrontations on his face; or that while he is now part of a cosmopolitan café society, he is the son of 'kafee'-owning immigrant parents; or that he revels in being able to make spontaneous purchase of ostentatious cultural symbols like ocean-going yachts? It should be expected, when viewed in this light, that *The Lost City* has been glossed by its critics as a folly on the grand scale, an outsized monument to Kerzner's own ego, an architectural compensation for his lack of 'real' class. *The Lost City*, we might say, is a complex circuitry of image

management in which Kerzner works to efface, or at least confuse, his origins, but which, paradoxically, some regard as announcing only the more crassly his inherent positioning in an uncultured class devoid of worthwhile symbolic capital. (I have already considered elements of this in discussing the theming of *The Lost City* as kitsch.) For all this, though, Kerzner retains something of the humanly ordinary figure in his pleasures (hamburgers, hotdogs, pizza), dress (takkies, jeans, golf-shirts, plastic anoraks), scatological speech (shit, fuck, bugger), restless over-reaching and self-proving. Burton suggests that "He's a rough and rugged Everyman; a perfect barometer of common tastes. And when it comes to entertainment, Sol knows that bigger is better" (1992:223).

In trying to convey something of Kerzner's exploits and achievements, journalists frequently incline towards figurative language and storytelling modes which vividly imply the appeal of the larger-than-life figure for even those who are not 'duped' by the narratives of consumer culture. This is how Barritt characterises Kerzner's brand of colloquial capitalist heroics: "'Hey lissen Peter, those Pearly Gates. You gotta refurb boy, you gotta do it. What you need is a water feature...'" (Barritt 1993:63). As these examples suggest, 'Kerzner' has entered a South African imaginary to the extent that an implied audience is imagined to know enough about his manner, speech and methods to 'get the joke'. Clearly, the monumentally heroic tropes used to gloss both *The Lost City* and Kerzner are inflected with a ludic element, even though this does not entail a simple undermining of the heroic: 'at play', instead, are interpretative energies that can be said to 'work' by variously diminishing and reinforcing meanings. By means of journalistic reference to "Clever Solly", "Sun King of All the Slots" and "King Sol", to "King Solomon's Whines", "the little fella" and "Who's a Clever Boy?", Sol's popularised personality (deliberately uncouth, tasteless, belligerent, demanding, hyperactive, loving, driven and imaginative) and biography (immigrant son and selfmade man who rose from impoverished circumstances to lifestyles of the rich and famous), become strategies whereby the enormous, even inhuman scale of *The Lost City* resort is deftly humanised – given a credible 'character', as it were – at the same time as Kerzner's public prominence appreciates: even if it is not unambiguously 'appreciated'.

Author and Authority: Uniqueness within Commodified Structure

On the one hand, a popular glossing of *The Lost City* through versions of Kerzner's life story – a narrative which intersects only unevenly with sanctioned marketing legends – suggests that 'the meaning' of contemporary cultural forms continues in some way to be located in consumers' imaginations through appeals to highly visible, celebrated, distinct, unique individuals. (This seems to be the case despite poststructuralist argument concerning the decentering of the author function.) Yet on the other hand, this very turn to life story and celebrity as explanatory method is larger than the 'unique' individual. For despite Kerzner's claimed-cum-imagined uniqueness, his signification stems not solely from his own agency. As my discussion suggests, 'Kerzner' functions within a diffuse structure of contemporary cultural feeling which both generates and is generated by an interest in infotainment and spectacle. Thus the appeal to the individual author and authority is made in the context of a consumer culture where meaning is patently so volatile, convoluted, and unstable that reality can be apprehended not by recourse solely to distinctive agency and named authorship – or, to put this a little differently, by appeals to High Cultural Authority – but through a constantly shifting, paradoxically clashing and blending range of ideas, images, tropes and icons which are to be found in consumer culture's 'already there'. Kerzner's fame is erratically negotiated in the media through figures of destiny and manufacture, typicality and ideality, the aristocratic and the democratic. He is at once the supposedly selfmade man fashioned through hard work, and the vestigial folk phenomenon with the archetypal, indefinable

'essence' that escapes logical agency and analysis. Kerzner at once authors his own story (through the proxy of agents and advertisers), and it is written for him by ideas about fame that are already in popular circulation and which journalists and a less professional audience turn to in staging their responses.

In such a situation, the devices of identification, naming and authorship represent attempts (rather than necessarily *realised* achievements) by agents of promotional culture to persuade a public of the distinctiveness of the brand. This difficult interrelationship of the singular with the structurally-pervasive informs much of the reportage on *The Lost City* launch. For instance, in the article already referred to, Richard McNeill dismissively refers to "TV's obsession with the *Lost City*" (1992:14). His comment is partially apposite in that it manages to imply the power of a prevailing consumer ontology in which 'the media' seem to have acquired a selfgenerating authority and agency, and in which cultural artefacts – from magazines, to television news, to advertisements – are not necessarily explicitly authored but seem instead simply to *emanate* from...from where? The Media. Many commodified forms, like Kerzner and *The Lost City*, are situated in the public eye through awkward combinations of modern and postmodern strategies. (In what follows, I am obviously drawing on Jameson [1991].) The strategies are modern in the sense that distinctiveness is claimed through exceptional authorship and markedly individual style, and postmodern in the sense that all forms of commodified culture can only be approximations of uniqueness. They are simulations and pastiches of already existent forms and styles in that they are 'authored', given identity, by a prevailing cultural structure that haphazardly jumbles together the would-be-exceptional with the generic ordinary. Yet McNeill's comment nevertheless occludes the fact that a technological medium cannot 'decide to be obsessed' (or that a structure of feeling cannot of its 'own accord' exist). Instead, it must be inflected with and powered by the convoluted intentions and desires of a mass of people – variously producers and consumers – who are themselves complexly affiliated to a range of cultural texts and capitals. In all of this, what I notice is not the necessary triviality of Kerzner and Co, but rather how *difficult* it is to marshal and manage signification in the service of a single cultural-ideological meaning: 'Kerzner' = amoral kitsch. In trying to explain Kerzner and his empire, commentators must negotiate the fabulous alongside the down-to-earth, the heroic, the ordinary, the bathetic, the excessive. As *Weekly Mail* journalist Anton Harber expresses it in a feature entitled "When taste is the enemy of creativity": "The aesthetes and the militants would like to bury Sol Kerzner" now that his "loud, brash monument to extravagance is open to guests. But try as you please, it's hard not to admire the energy" (1992:22).

The will to give serious space to an ambivalent response is also implied in a comment made by Elleke Boehmer in the pages of the *Times Literary Supplement*. Boehmer draws unusual, even extravagant parallels between *Lost City* entrepreneur Sol Kerzner and South African man of letters Sol T. Plaatje. She does not develop these in detail, but the analogy is provocative in relation to those discriminating impulses in South African cultural analysis which would probably lead to Plaatje and Kerzner being situated within morally divergent universes.

In the early years of this century, Plaatje, who had been a postman, court interpreter and newspaper editor, was concerned to reveal something of what he called "the back of the native mind" by recasting aspects of black history and folklore into the African epic novel *Mhudi* (1978), originally published in 1930. Plaatje also translated Shakespeare into indigenous languages, wrote journalistic pieces, and produced three Zonophone records of hymns and tribal songs. Further, he scripted and appeared in an ethnic theatrical sketch called the "Cradle of the World", designed to fill the reel change intermissions during the screening of a wildlife/ethnographic film in London during the late nineteenth century; he also toured South Africa with 'Plaatje's bioscope',

a portable projector and set of educational films that he had acquired on his travels in the United States and Canada. This synopsis of his cultural interests serves to emphasise their geographical, cultural and formal breadth and the complex intersections which they claimed amongst forms like orality and literacy, the popular and the official, the African and the European. In March 1998, Plaatje's gravesite in Kimberley was declared a national monument, the event being remarked on prime-time television news, and Plaatje heralded as the first person to record Nkosi Sikele' iAfrica, before the hymn was widely-known and certainly decades before it became an inspirational articulation of black identity, and a key component in the national anthem of a democratic South Africa.

Now even if we want to insist that Plaatje's motives, unlike Kerzner's, were primarily moral rather than financial, the issue of cultural syncretism cannot be side-stepped. Both men are culturally cosmopolitan South Africans, who envisage their actions as purposeful interventions in a South African national trajectory. This will hardly be music to some ears, since the word 'cosmopolitan' is deeply unattractive to serious academics who would believe "that, especially when employed as academics, intellectuals" are "a 'special' interest group representing nothing but themselves" (Robbins 1993:182). For this group, the word 'cosmopolitan', beyond the adjectival sense of 'belonging to all parts of the world; not restricted to any one country or its inhabitants'

immediately evokes the image of a privileged person: someone who can claim to be a 'citizen of the world' by virtue of independent means, expensive tastes, and a globe-trotting life-style. The association of cosmopolitan globality with privilege – classy consumption, glossy cleavage, CNN, modems, faxes, Club Med, and the Trilateral Commission. (Robbins 1993:182)

The two South Africa Solomons whom I am presently discussing do not fit equally well this particular version of the 'cosmopolitan' bill. This we may attribute to moral inclination, or we may more circumspectly remark that given the historical timeframe, the cosmopolitanism of the older figure could not but have appeared as less commodified than that of the contemporary Kerzner. Yet for all that, both Plaatje and Kerzner may be considered entrepreneurs in innovative, fluid, mobile areas of South African-global culture, and this cosmopolitanism makes pious distinctions between the two on the grounds that one occupied a pre-commodified space rather more difficult than Kerzner's detractors might wish. Instead of "renouncing cosmopolitanism as a false universal", then, we might value "it as an impulse to knowledge that is shared with others, a striving to transcend partiality that is itself partial, but no more so than the similar cognitive [cultural] strivings of many diverse peoples" (Robbins 1993:1940). A cosmopolitan South Africanism, then, would comprise overlapping syncretisms and secularisms. Given Plaatje's disparate involvements, for example, it becomes awkward to argue for his 'South Africanness' as narrowly national. It is hybrid, a subjectivity negotiated in relation to a sense of the national in the global. Perhaps it is time, even beyond the individual cases of either Plaatje or Kerzner, for South Africans to theorise their cultural identities as heterogeneous and constantly in process. Such an awareness could form a vital counter to a myth that is difficult to lose: that of apparently coherent national identity. We cannot simply present, as our return ticket into international sociopolitical and cultural arenas, a real, and authentic, a pure, South African cultural tradition. Viewed in this light, if *The Lost City* and Kerzner do signify an undeniable hyperbole characteristic of the manufacture of greatness and celebrity, a simple, univocal name-calling in which these cultural phenomena are nominated as the epitome of exploitative kitsch and egoism is misguided. Both the resort and Sol Kerzner, its developer, are cultural phenomena which awkwardly refuse the easy interpretation. For with its insolent borrowings from around the globe,

The Lost City reconfigures within a southern African context a metropolitan cultural form, posing challenging possibilities for contemporary 'South African' identity.

A Last Return to The Lost City

As I have said, debts to 'foreign' concepts such as Disney imagineering and postmodernism notwithstanding, the themed entertainment complex that is The Lost City offers conscious challenges to arbiters of European High Cultural taste. The Lost City rebuffs conventional cultural categories and ascriptions: if *this* is how the Metropole wants to imagine Africa, as a location that remains to a large extent an exotic Other, then we will market fantasy and difference as a form of cultural resource – with a little help, paradoxically, from major American theme park architects and Hollywood movie designers. What academics might learn from this, I suspect, is that apparently stereotypical tropes are variously invoked and refracted in multiple mediations of The Lost City. They both position and displace the signifiers that would typically be associated with an 'African' ecumene. 'Adventure' and 'Africa', accordingly, can be recognised as signifiers at once familiar and novel; inviting of amused participation as well as the suspension of disbelief; facilitating apparently uncomplicated pleasure, as well as the writerly desire of more explicit parody.

Despite some critics' insistence on the decontextualisations and oversimplifications involved in the figure of 'Africa' (re-)invented for The Lost City, this trope might well be expected to exert degrees of audience appeal in terms of an heroic African past alongside the dream of an affluent, globally-influential South African future. Despite its stylistic declaration of an ancient past, the resort is not inherently distinct from other mass-mediated representations of South African contemporaneity. The Lost City intersects with a consumer magazine such as *Tribute*, which popularises sophisticated urban black style and remarkable South African achievements; it intersects with television programmes such as *People of the South*, where urbane host Dali Tambo – he of the famous activist parentage, raised abroad, and unversed in any indigenous language – orchestrates a weekly feast (or camp-fest) of glossy bongo-bongo African style and human presence. The Lost City, then, could be said to look forward in its ostensible backwardness – or, if one wishes to express this more ambivalently, it becomes difficult to trace with ideological precision the perspectives, points of view and conceptual directions through which the resort is materialised for its public.

To make the quirky linkages that I have amongst The Lost City and various cultural forms from Disney to Plaatje is not to deny but to concede the existence of contradiction. Having admitted paradox, we cannot emphatically and unproblematically claim that the fictionalising imperative associated with The Lost City obscures the real history of ancient settlements, making it less likely that people will be interested in the "REAL lost city...[of] the eighteenth-century Tswana settlement of Molokane a mere 45 km from Sol's fantasy civilisation" (Haffajee 1992:22). Nor is it simply a matter of claiming that Kerzner, like adventure writer Wilbur Smith, "annexes all of African historical cultural achievement", trying "to take away from the blacks their own history" (Couzens 1982b:50). Instead, if we are interested in a cultural commentary that is complex, we might be encouraged to reconsider the strategies according to which history, heritage, modernity and cultural identity are themselves invented for and by a popular audience. The resort gives prominence to the paradox of an allochronic, perfect past – it has been, it has happened – as the imagined "contrary of the continuous 'imperfect' present, which is a process, an incomplete state (Shanks and Tilley 1992:9). Within a South Africa of the late 1990s, the legend and overscaled simulation of The Lost City embody the very uncertainty associated with a time of transition and a shift towards new identities: and associated with this uncertainty, too,

may be the felt desire for certainty, for declarative symbols of modernity and emblematic greatness. This is hubristic, yes, but it is also human; the one is implicated in, rather than distinct from, the other.

What I have implied in this Chapter is the need to move beyond a critique that is convinced of its certainties, and insistently imagines for the English Studies researcher a space morally and ideologically above the compromised landscapes of what is a commoditised politics of pleasure. Despite the undeniable excess of its scale and informing ideas; despite its implication in the perverse geographies of an apartheid South Africa, The Lost City, like the saturated genres of romance and adventure more broadly, accrues diffuse and often oblique cultural meanings that may be more in keeping with popular myths and desires than with demands for moral-political correctness.

My own negotiating of The Lost City has required me to engage with a form which, like that of 'the mall', is perversely monumental and shifting. The Lost City is there, in Bophuthatswana, but not there, for there is also here, in South Africa. Indeed, the homeland in one sense no longer exists, having been redrawn in post-apartheid schemas as the North West Province. The Lost City embodies and disembodies Africa, in configurations that are interpreted as variously real and virtual reality; it is present through the 'incredible' magnitude of its structure, and re-presented in a proliferation of media publicity. In this Chapter, I have sought to offer an appropriately creative methodology for analysing The Lost City. I have referred to a range of cultural discourses that includes fiction, film, advertising, and academic research, in order to illustrate not only how they very obviously showcase the tropes of Africa and adventure that are associated with The Lost City, but how they constitute unsettled conceptual ecumenes in which 'empire' and 'postmodernity', 'Euro-America' and 'Africa', 'politics' and 'pleasure' exist in ambiguous interrelationship. And in all of this I have sought to recognise the difficulty of placing my response in relation to labels which, since they are unstable rather than binaristic, cannot be imagined as definitively moral or compromised descriptions of contemporary South African culture.

Notes to Chapter 4

1. Well before the proliferation of those critical discourses concerned to deconstruct tourism and travel, Roland Barthes made it clear in *Mythologies* (1973) – in clear and accessible language – that travel volumes such as Hachette’s World Guides, dubbed ‘the *Blue Guide*’, and the *Michelin Guide*, could be read through poststructuralist principles.
2. As the shifting double and single inverted commas of this quotation indicate, in offering his own comments on The Lost City a writer by the name of Murray draws on a piece by another writer, called Stengel. The punctuation is awkward, and I have retained it merely for academic accuracy. Yet it had crossed my mind, here, completely to forgo quotation, since descriptions such as these are commonplace in media commentary on The Lost City. Even to the extent of their being aware of the resort’s fakery, they derive in substantial measure from the media kits distributed by Sun International to the nearly 1000 invited journalists during the publicising and launch of the resort. Indeed, for the duration of the promotion, a fully-equipped media resource centre was available to journalists on location in The Palace Hotel. From there they could source images, file stories and generally manage their links with their home media. Individual, distinctive responses, then, were bound up in complicated ways with the narratives preferred by Sun International.
3. For an interesting account of Sun City and the anti-apartheid campaign, see Rob Nixon’s *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood* (1994).
4. For more of the same, you might be fortunate enough to get hold of financial journalist Alan Greenblo’s contentious, unauthorised biography of Sol Kerzner (1997).
5. But for spatial constraints, it was tempting, here, to take up Jonathan Raban’s arguments in *Soft City* (1990), a volume first published in 1974. Reviewed in the *Sunday Telegraph* as “a psychological handbook for urban survival”, Raban’s book – although subjected to criticism by David Harvey in *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989) – makes a compelling case for the city of the creative imagination as a powerful antidote to the bluntness of the sprawling urban metropolis. This is not an aspect of city-life that Sole would seem willing to allow. And he would almost certainly not be prepared to countenance the possibility that a cultural phenomenon like The Lost City represents a fantastical extension of the fantasy capacity inherent in real cities.
6. In Chapter 2 I discuss an analogous tendency in the relation of feminists to women who read women’s magazines. Hermes (1995), in her work on women’s magazines, casts this as a ‘discourse of concern’ which fails to grant sufficient intellectual or experiential agency to ordinary people.
7. See also David Harvey’s article “Social Justice, Postmodernism, and the City” (1996). His final bent is towards ideology and political-economy, but instead of taking this forgone conclusion as his pretended starting point, he grapples with the possibilities of reading New York City’s Tomkins Square Park, a highly contested urban space, through the bifocal lenses of ‘on a good day’ and ‘on a bad day’.
8. McClintock gives examples from history, and from history transmuted into adventure fiction. For the dystopian critic of The Lost City, particularly interesting are likely to be the unequal forms of agency implicit in McClintock’s account of European monarchy in relation to elements of the Zulu family drama. She refers to the “blood-rivalry between

Mpande's sons, Ceteswayo [*sic*] and Mbulazi" that "climaxed in a battle in 1856" (1990:108) in which Cetshwayo kaMpande was victorious. She explains how after animosities ceased, Theophilus Shepstone in September 1873 "proceeded to enact a pompous ceremony of monarchical recognition which he alone took seriously. Ceteswayo [*sic*] was proclaimed king with a great deal of pomp and ritual invented by Shepstone for the occasion" (1990:108). In this pageant, she remarks, Shepstone was said by adventure novelist Rider Haggard in 1882 to be "'standing in the place of Ceteswayo's father, and so representing the nation'" (McClintock 1990:108). Indeed, Shepstone himself seems to have imagined this positioning, and to have believed himself to have "been instituted as nominal 'founding father' of the Zulu nation" (McClintock 1990:108). Kerzner, in other words, has striking historical precursors.

9. Since the launch of *The Lost City*, Adrian Abel and a team of fifteen labourers taught by a local stone mason who had done restoration work for the National Monument's Council have built the 48-bed Lodge at the Ancient City near Masvingo, for the Bulawayo-based safari operation Touch the Wild. The style of the lodge is intended to reflect "the grandeur and the dynasty" of Great Zimbabwe, and it is the only structure within sight of the Zimbabwe ruins. "So closely does the building style of today's lodge resemble that of Great Zimbabwe – built ten centuries ago without the benefit of iron tools, mortar or the wheel – that visitors could be excused for thinking both were built by the same people" (Norman 1996:30). Like "the ancients", Abel and his co-workers "had no machinery at all: no jackhammers, no bulldozers, no earth-moving equipment....Construction was also carried out in consultation with the National Monuments Commission, and when graves were uncovered tribal healers were called in and the necessary rituals observed". Abel has also said that the director of the Monuments Commission warned him not to "'make this place a bigger tourist attraction than Great Zimbabwe itself. He was joking. I think'" (Norman 1996:31).
10. Although Haggard returned to England in 1881 and studied for the bar, writing allowed him fairly soon to relinquish his law practice, and throughout his life he cultivated a passion for travel to foreign locations. Between 1887 and 1900, for instance, he made trips to Egypt, Iceland, Mexico, Florence, Cyprus, and Palestine. Indeed, it was his habit to gather information by saturating "himself in the atmosphere as a prelude to some piece of fiction" (Katz 1987:14).
11. If asked, viewers of *The Hidden City* would probably tell you that the series had been filmed on location at The Lost City. It certainly looks like it. Instead, though, except for some interior scenes shot in Johannesburg, filming occurred in the Knysa forest on an extraordinary set by production designer Hans Nel who has also worked on *Shaka Zulu* and *Barney Barnato*. According to Sally Scott, one of the journalists treated to a tour, Nel, at a cost of some R1 million, "has transformed the mundane – polystyrene, foam, wood, etc., into a towering hidden city...which covers 5000 square metres, with walls up to eight metres high. It all really has to be seen, to be believed...[and] the full scope of the set...amazed even the most cynical amongst us" (1995:7).
12. Another tourist site which could be theorised in relation to uncertain rather than supposedly apparent meaning is Shakaland. A critic like Peter Davis (1996), for instance, considers forms of commodified Shakaphernalia and what he terms "Zooluology" to be politically suspect. Davis usefully and thoroughly details the production history of cinemagraphics like *Shaka Zulu* (1986), whose director Bill Faure has had a hand in shaping some of the mass-mediated pageants through which *The Lost City* has been advertised. Davis also mentions

the themed village of Shakaland in KwaZulu-Natal, obviously cynical about the resort's cultural authenticity. Reputedly built near the site of Shaka's capital, Shakaland began its media career as the film set for the television series *Shaka Zulu*, and was given an extended life in another televised drama of colonial-settler history, *The Adventures of John Ross*. Davis fails to remark, however, that Shakaland is regarded by many as the closest they will ever get to 'the real thing'. It is popularly considered by both tourists and the Zulus who live and labour there to offer a slice of lost 'Zulu life' that is credible, educationally-valuable and sustaining of a complex, modern self. The marketing of a tribal identity, in other words, is not in any linear way expressive of politically dubious ideologies.

13. Such representations of Kerzner make good on the salacious undertones of the article title, and nod towards the sexually- and ideologically-charged power of a popular James Bond icon and his phallic golden gun. Interestingly, though, in his work on Bond as cultural hero, Michael Denning (1992) points to the often contradictory readings of Bond that derive from an audience's after-image of the stories, their memories of fragments of situational evidence and character kernels: "The point is that each set of attributes can be countered with another; Bond is a contested figure who has been accented in a number of ways" (1992:213); he is "something of a cipher that can be invested with a variety of content" (1992:214). Despite relating Bond to a number of congeneric analogues and to eclectic contexts of reception, however, Denning finally does not work to release 'Bond' from the negativity of ideology critique; instead he argues that Bond's range of influence incorporates and endorses a compromised commodity culture. Despite the promising conceptual directions in his paper, then, Denning concludes by repositioning 'Bond' as a powerful character who circulates ideologically-suspect codes of tourism and leisure.
14. Van Houten, for instance, would have been a deliberate choice as presenter for this documentary: like Khanyisile Dhlomo-Mkhize, to whom I referred in Chapter 2 on women's magazines, Van Houten was a popular prime-time newsreader and presenter of televisual magazine shows, and her life had been thoroughly processed for popular consumption by interviews and features in consumer magazines. Her long relationship, but not marriage, with award-winning wildlife cameraman John Varty; her glamorous good looks; her media career; her vegetarianism; her many proposals of marriage; her retreat to 'the bush' from the 'bright lights' of Johannesburg; the birth of her and Varty's daughter 'Savannah'... Van Houten was herself a popularly commodified South African personality appropriate to the exhibiting of Kerzner's own celebrity: sufficiently minor so as not to upstage; sufficiently major as to deserve the spotlight's borrowed glow.

CONCLUSION

Using several South African examples and proceeding from the institutional context of English Studies, this Thesis makes a case for the highly unstable, even volatilised nature of contemporary cultural production and consumption. As I have suggested, in a country that has long been dominated by oppressive racial politics, there has been little wish or even opportunity to conceptualise so-called middle class cultural identities as shifting rather than static, as curiously meaningful rather than merely mediocre or monolithic. Within the specific intellectual field of English Studies, despite the gains of literary-cultural theory, it remains the case that the documents, images, products, contexts and audiences of consumer culture are often treated by academics with deep doubt, usually on the grounds that commercially-mediated culture lacks the formal complexity of culture proper, and/or the moral claims of overtly oppositional, politicised cultural engagement. (Versions of this critique pertain even though many critics have wrested 'culture' of its capital C and brought the term into productive alignment with a range of discourses from orality to feminism to black power [Nava *et al* 1996].) I illustrate by means of several casestudies, however, that the meanings that may be attached to (or torn from) magazines, malls and themed leisure are overcoded, elusive, allusive...difficult to recruit wholeheartedly in the service of those agendas that might conventionally be categorised as 'radical' or 'conservative'. In contrast with an intellectual tendency that prefers to secure the meaning of both 'Kerzner' and 'The Lost City' as crass, amoral superficiality, for instance, I demonstrate in Chapter 4 that they exceed the control of marketing toponymy and anthroponymy, as well as derisive labelling by those professional cultural agents who seek to mediate popular taste and politics, and that in doing so they may usefully be considered to stage 'lived debates' about the shapes that contemporary South African culture might take. It should not be assumed, I suggest, that the extravagant excess of interpretation associated with the consumer magazine, shopping and leisure denotes a mass audience's predilection for surface rather than deep meaning, precluding real critical engagement. And when it comes to the role of the intellectual theorising of consumer culture, I maintain that this excess requires a critic to take far more creative account of the ways in which meaning-making is experienced: as consciously negotiated, emotively felt and discursively-associative. The highly unstable, mediated texts and contexts of contemporary consumer culture necessitate that even overtly market-driven forms such as advertising need to be conceptualised through models of theoretical complexity, and an underlying assumption of my study is that the meanings of contemporary culture are awkwardly authored by systems and by individuals, rather than bearing only the authoritarian signature of Capital.

The Thesis illustrates that responses to consumer culture, expressed as extremes, take the forms of fascination and repulsion, enchantment and disenchantment. Yet as I have argued, constantly to posit that the necessary response is fixed at either of the poles – most usually the negative, for those intellectuals engaged in a critique of material culture – is a fundamental misrepresentation of what it means to live in the late-twentieth-century. Perhaps we cannot resolve the paradoxes, but it is at least important to acknowledge the constant movement that occurs between the ostensible binaries of pleasure and politics, say, or endorsement and critique, when we shape our relations with commodification. As Chaney observes in his study of lifestyles, there is "an inescapable conflict between the diversity that I see as emancipating in contemporary culture and the pressures towards an effective homogeneity" (1996:145-146), yet when he goes on to discuss the competing emphases that occur in sociocultural theory upon either structure or agency (which are analogous to the *langue* of fixed grammatical system and the *parole* of individual speech), he is uncomfortable with the fact that so "many writers on contemporary post-

industrial culture seem to emphasise one side or the other in the ways these processes are articulated, without appreciating that both are operating simultaneously” (1996:84).

His comments enable me to reiterate two central premises of my own research. Firstly, that with the struggle towards more democratic understandings of South African life, it is time to attempt an analysis of late-twentieth-century South African consumer culture which, while working to correct a predominantly negative assessment, is founded neither on dismissal nor celebration, but on an ambivalence which makes place for the likelihood that moments of desire co-exist with those of doubt, loving with loathing. Secondly – in a further refusal to recognise what I consider to be a false binary opposition – that such a study needs to be informed by the unsettling logic not of an either/or, but of Radner’s ‘both...and’ (1995). Something may be both its Self and its Other (often preferentially imagined in cultural commentary as the good/true self and the bad/false other), since these positionalities are less stable than has conventionally been assumed. The cultural form of the mall and the network of practices with which it is related, for example, may be at once negatively *and* positively experienced. Both of these are simple points, but they bear repeating in view of the fact that even sophisticated recent South African cultural commentary (*vide* Bertelsen 1998, or Chapman 1998) is unwilling or unable to conceive of consumer culture as a shifting set of relations that is generated by, and generative of, awkward alliances of liberation and constraint. As the reader of the Thesis has seen, I neither cudgel nor cuddle my commodified subject matter: I present it humanely as the material reality of many people’s daily lives, and I propose it as the legitimate, if equivocal object of critical enquiry.

In one sense, yes: the political economy of mass-mediated culture is not amenable to dramatic change. Patterns of production, distribution, and scheduling, for example, despite modifications that pertain to ownership, tend to be embedded in the long course of a history that has seen economic and political power vested in the hands of a very few. Accordingly, despite the nuances of my discussion in this Thesis, subtleties generated in my capacity as creative producer of meanings about a received consumer culture, I have neither the finance, the technological infrastructure or the professional expertise to enable me to publish a glossy magazine, build a mall, or develop a theme park. This hyperbolic agency remains the prerogative of Capital. It will come as no surprise to you that I, unlike Sol Kerzner in his position as executive Chair of Sun International, am not contemplating the investment of huge sums in international resort development. Nor, despite my willingness to understand the negotiations of organised labour, am I actively involved in devising legislative or other structures which might limit the power of Kerzner and his ilk. Even at its most dramatic, my speculation is characterised by the wishful projections of the ordinary consumer: perhaps I will win the Lotto, and be swept away for a luxury vacation in an exotic location.

Contingent and constrained as these small imaginative investments might be, they are also deeply consequential, and need not be thought to connote the consumer’s – or the citizen’s – incorporation into the System by means of a devious fantasy bribe. My argument throughout the Thesis is that the corollary of granting Capital’s aggrandising ability should not be to envisage the consumer-citizen as disabled, since Capital’s evident authority does not render absent the imaginative and life-sustaining uses to which the products of a culture industry may be put. There are always polysemic and inconsistent meanings in and beyond those preferred by Capital, and these demand to be theorised through a proliferation of grammars – among them semiotic, economic, aesthetic, political, symbolic, material, contextual, emotional, dissenting, intellectual and aberrant – which appear now to intersect and now to be tangential. In this regard, it is further worth remarking that even while individual users of culture do not neatly conform to embedded structural principles, it may also be the case that the systemic and formulaic aspects of commodity

culture are sometimes experienced by people as a *resource* rather than an absolute restriction (or hidden, oppressive force); such a resource may be imagined to endow life at once with a comforting predictability, *and* to offer the possibility for extraordinarily distinctive identity. In this Thesis, then, consumers are not inept or possessed, but possessed of elusive cultural competences and capacities for comprehension. This does not mean, of course, that all people will respond to commodity culture with the theoretical virtuosity of some intellectuals. Yet it does become more likely that all people, different capacities for conceptual and experiential distinction notwithstanding, understand their own relation to commodity culture through complex vocabularies, imagined as much as articulated, that include affiliation, identification, appropriation, negotiation, substitution, difference and deferment.

Furthermore, as this Thesis has argued, despite the insistence of dystopian intellectuals, even ostensibly monumental cultural powers are not necessarily coherent and complete in either their own organisational structure or their field of influence. In turning to market research and advertising as technologies through which to make material an ideal 'target audience', for instance, magazine publishing houses, retailers and companies whose business is leisure and entertainment are to some degree anxiously projecting rather than smugly securing their consumers. As I have suggested in the case of *Tribute*, for instance, the idea motivating the publication of the new magazine was to capitalise on black buying power: *Tribute* was conceived as a vehicle which would 'deliver' 'financially fluent' black consumers to advertisers and thence to clients. To an extent, therefore, the publishers worked to produce a readership which possessed the comparatively high degree of surplus capital traditionally associated with a middle class. Mosotho maintains, here, that the original publisher "was simply a good businessman who saw an opportunity and seized it. All he wanted was to make money, not contribute to black emancipation or empowerment" (1997:40). Yet the motive of financial gain could not function independently from *Tribute* journalists' desires to showcase black South Africans' professional achievement and social and economic success, all of which were asking to be publicly articulated – and hence validated – in a South Africa that was visibly struggling towards democracy during the late 1980s. Even in their corporate composition and management style, then, the culture industries are riven with conflict and difference, so that claims for an all-powerful consumer Ideology can be staged by academics only with extreme difficulty and at least serious debate and demonstration, rather than through mere assertion.

Related to this is the fact that consumer culture has led to the blurring of established distinctions, whether between local and global, male and female, urban and suburban, academic and ordinary, history and fiction, or public and private. If such blurring *does* generate uncomfortable confusion and lack of clarity, I also in this instance refute the implied corollary: that it leads to a consumer who is passive and malleable, less able to resist the devious manipulations of the culture industry than were s/he able to generate a coherent conceptual map of the relations which characterise cultural production. Nor, if I have at points in the Thesis recognised that consumption frequently occurs in anonymous and mass-reproduced contexts, have I insisted on such rationalised commercialisation as leading only to a necessary diminishing of cultural diversity and individuality. Instead, I have sought to allow for commodity culture an ambiguity of effect and an ambivalence of response, acknowledging the possibility, for instance, of an ideological and experiential boundary crossing which might occur both in the production of commodified products, and in their contexts of use. Such volatility may contribute to the shifting of ossified meanings, helping to transform what have become naturalised fields of experience and belief. Let me give two brief examples, bearing upon history, and upon the body. In my critical readings of malls and themed leisure, I have problematised the assumption that the

significance of an architectural site which makes use of history in its design envelope is always a function of fidelity or otherwise to the past 'as it really was'. In assessing the shape of the past in the present, I have sought to work with what Bennett has called "past-present alignments" (1989:73), giving attention to some of the ways in which built environment is positioned in relation to the existing field of historical and related discourses. As Bennett explains, these may be scholarly papers, or extracts published in the press, advertisements intertextual with historical figures and events, historical films, guide book entries, or fashionable interpretations of earlier styles. Their interrelation in a consumer archive can mean that the past may take on new, extended and often deep meanings in the present of commodity culture. Even the authentic archaeological-historical site, in terms of this argument, cannot be experienced in a 'pure' and hence 'true' way that is beyond the imputed taint of commercial culture.

Turning to my second example of conceptual boundary crossings: I have also tried in my analyses to move beyond constructionist ideas of the body – and the consumer body – as merely an object of discourse, preferring to address the subtle reciprocities between the body and social being, and the body as expressive of both actual and imagined 'self'. The body politic cannot, as I have argued, be evaluated as a serious space distinct from a superficial politics of the body: the citizen on whom various institutions of national and regional government have designs, is at once the consumer for whom design (as material and imaginative aesthetic) is increasingly constitutive of daily reality. As Silverstone argues, if with a little unease, to "engage now with such politics requires the recognition that what is emerging is a suburban public sphere, in which judgements of taste are what pass for political judgements, and where power dressing has more significance than the traditional dressings of power" (1997:21). Importantly, too, I have tried to show that the blurring which occurs in forms such as the periodical, advertising and sites of retail and leisure is in many ways lived, emotional and even visceral, rather than remote intellectual abstraction. It is precisely on account of these lived meanings that commodity culture may be thought "to inform and constitute new understandings of the relationships between individual and collective forms of social existence" (Chaney 1996:159). The self as it is lived through such commodification becomes not automatically a narrow, standardised entity, but often a reflexive, and certainly a recursive, project. Here, a women's magazine such as *Cosmopolitan* provides an apt case in point. Rather than inevitably denigrating the space of 'the *Cosmo* girl' as one which inscribes a superficial Female subject position, it becomes feasible to consider it a site in which debates about gendered relations are brought to the fore; even, indeed, in which a macrosocial privileging of a politically consequential 'public sphere' is brought into challenging association with the domestic, the feminised, the emotional logic of heart economics.

While individual Chapters of the Thesis have used some of the skills acquired in English Studies to analyse magazines, malls and themed leisure, I have wished not to identify this critical-analytical culture with a narrow set of inherently distinctive, aestheticised objects. Instead, I have in each case attempted to situate the object of enquiry in a network of discursive and experiential relations. This has allowed me to give attention to form while not privileging an intrinsic formalism, and to investigate a multiplicity of relationships between producer, consumer, context and text, in which meanings are claimed for and attributed to, rather than unproblematically given. Again, my treatment of South African women's magazines illustrates this point. While I refer in Chapter 2 to material from *Cosmopolitan*, *Fair Lady*, *Femina* and *True Love*, my sometimes fleeting use of textual evidence is deliberately intended to destabilise what I consider to be negative critique's mistaken emphasis on the repressive authority of the magazine text 'itself' (or, seen from another perspective, the conviction still circulating in moral-formalist literary studies that these are mediocre texts). In order to delineate the subject of 'the women's magazine', I turn

to a diversity of texts (among them comments by media professionals in trade journals, newspaper reportage, editorials, conversation, academic criticism, own experience and readers' letters), readers (among them implied, academic, popular, and ethnographic), and contexts (among them research, the lecture hall, leisure and the print media context of the magazine text). I have had to grant that if the South African instance of the women's magazine genre remains under-researched in either academic critical discourse or in journalistic commentary, it is a serial and even popular cultural literacy in being repeatedly and fractally circulated through billboards, television, radio, print, film and the internet. Ranging in this expansive field, I attempt to convey the breadth and depth available to researchers of women's magazines not simply as coherent bodies of text, but as dispersed cultural phenomena that require from researchers equally fluid conceptual maps. As I have said, my study attempts to counter two related tendencies in the responses of many analysts of South African mass or popular culture: an inclination towards rather too-easy moral judgement concerning what is variously represented as the formulaic and/or the fractured, and a widespread unwillingness to understand the 'meanings' of consumer culture as having as much to do with hopes and longings and daily grinds, as with pressures towards ideological correctness. That these meanings occur across a range of texts, rather than in an originary, standpoint text, perhaps strengthens the need for the kind of complex critical response that I am advocating.

It must also be said, here, that my more than usually expanded range of textuality cannot be taken to imply a total toppling of an analytical methodology premised on 'textual reference'. Let me argue the case this way. The reader will have noticed that in turning what I perceive to be an obsession in South African cultural studies with the macropolitical and the expressly radical towards a broadly English Studies engagement with 'textuality', I also borrow from the shifts which have occurred in international cultural studies from the overt, totalising politics of a marxist critique to the unstable, less-than-obvious relations of the everyday. Despite using texts as socially-suggestive rather than as exemplary, I hope not to have fallen foul of what has been called 'banality in cultural studies'. The phrase is Meaghan Morris's, and conveys her disquiet that "somewhere in some English publisher's vault there is a master disk from which thousands of versions of the same article about pleasure, resistance, and the politics of consumption are being run off under different names with minor variations" (1990:21). I know what she means; for like her I have spent hours distractedly scanning cultural journals and bookstore shelves in search of material that is 'real'. But I also believe that there remains a lot of potentially valuable 'textual' work to be done towards a South African analysis of the kinds of hybrid forms and processes which go into the making and re-making of contemporary local cultures. The devil's advocate might ask, here: just because a metropolitan intellectual 'centre' of which Morris's Australia is now part finds itself replete with cultural analysis of a certain sort, ought the appetite of the cultural-intellectual 'margins' for analogous stories of itself to be appeased? Anyway, I am also persuaded that such accounts could be more than a mirror to, or a colonial mimicry of, a 'saturated' metropolitan market. They could become part of a narrative in which the local is understood to exist in shifting interrelation with the global.

Salient throughout the Thesis, too, is the question not only of abstract 'Self' and 'Other', but of how I perceive myself in relation to the material which I analyse. I cannot rehearse the history of metaphors of visibility which have come to predominate in descriptions of modernity and its futures. Let me more simply remark that exhibition, spectacle, the image, and so on are widely theorised within academic disciplines as the pervasive urban epistemology of consumer culture. As my own study has indicated, the responses range from a derision of surface spectacle, to arguments which make a case for the visual as one of the chronotopes of late-twentieth-century experience. By a popular audience, too, this visual emphasis is partly regarded as superfluous

embellishment and banal 'image-chatter', but it is also partly understood to be constitutive of an everyday reality in which 'seeing' is ubiquitously present as film, advertisement, billboard, print journalism, television, window shopping, crowd watching, conscious sense of self, and so on. The implication, I have sought to show in treating myself as subject of intellectual scrutiny alongside the forms of magazine, mall and themed leisure, is that the cultural critic must regard herself as existing through this visually dense mode of being, rather than being comfortably beyond it and able to view it with objective, omniscient gaze. Instead of claiming an intellectually secure self-regard and naturally superior insight, she must consider herself to be within the consumer relations which form the so-called object of her inquiry. I. She. Even the person and voice become less easy to designate when curious intersections between subjectivities are acknowledged. All of us, it might be said, are rehearsing contingency of meaning: experiencing life as a muddle of moments and moments of episodic clarity, few – if any – of which are definite and unequivocal. The 'self' is 'itself' an incomplete and iterative project. All of which implies a significant challenge to the cultural authority of the self-proclaimed 'radical perspective'. What is innovative in my own research in the context of South African literary-cultural studies, I think, is that in engaging with an array of overlapping texts and contexts I try – like Morris (1990) in her Australian situation – to question the place(s) from which I speak and write, a melange of academic, ordinary, white, female, middle class and other subjectivities, and to pose questions of speaking and writing of 'a' South African cultural place.

In all of this, I touch on a number of contemporary South African realities – urban, suburban, middle class, ordinary – and, without wishing to deny the power relations through which such unstable imaginative and material collectivities are generated and dissolved, I have hoped to encourage in intellectual practice a sympathetic return to what have tended in theory to be represented as culturally and economically dominant codes. I hope to have shown, in addressing prolific and prolifically productive productions of meaning in everyday life, that dominance and subordination are not without conceptual volatility and experiential diversity. In her 1993 essay on North American consumer culture, Warren is interesting in this regard. She implies that if cultural critics have regularly invoked Antonio Gramsci's notion of 'hegemony' in order to convey theses of cultural domination, they tend not to have made enough of his "enthusiastic assessment of popular culture". Gramsci's concept of hegemony, she maintains, "allows not just popular culture but specifically the realm of leisure and entertainment to emerge as a crucial domain of study" (1993:178).

As has already been implied in the Introduction, the Thesis was prompted, in part, through my exasperation at nowhere finding my own race, class and gender positioning represented in South African cultural studies with any degree of emotional-experiential nuance. 'I' was repeatedly present only as oppressor or, contradictorily, as victim. Nor was I satisfied, it must be said, with the many representations of white South Africanness offered in conventionally literary forms such as the novel. I wanted more of, and for, the middle class life I was living: a more human complexity than was evident in cultural studies; a more para-literary field of reference than could be accommodated in an English Studies penchant for generic form. The issue was not, it should be clear from the analyses of South African contemporary culture offered in the Thesis, to unearth images of my cultural Self that were answerable solely to solipsistic ends; images which were miraculously beyond the contested force fields of cultural-political struggle that have been such a visible feature of South Africa's history. Such a purging would have entailed extreme misrepresentation. (Paradoxically, this skewed characterisation of 'a middle class' ordinary, though different in ideological affiliation, would not have been dissimilar from the invariably bogey-banal 'bourgeois subject position' which recurs in many forms of left critique, and which

I was hoping to render more subtle.) In a South Africa several difficult years into a non-racial democracy, I willingly granted moments of villainy and vacuity in 'the white South African psyche', but was more interested in evolving detailed, complex analyses of a heterogeneous South African 'ordinary' than convenient race, class and gender labelling could allow. (Or, for that matter, than was implied in a radical critical orthodoxy which endorsed as genuinely 'popular' those uses of culture that dramatically resisted hegemonic controls, and deemed all 'other' responses tragically compromised.) My own representation of these contemporary cultural identities is a characterisation, if you will, that sets two-dimensional typicality (and arguments which have dismissed 'the middle-class subject position' in terms of its always-already-given superficiality and compromise) in multiple relation to less obvious aspects of what it means to be human: interiority, desire, anxiety, aspiration, confusion; the acknowledgement of style, design, beauty – held in uneasy alignment with the recognition that beauty is not necessarily truth, and that it is not ahistorical. As the individual Chapters have made clear, my attempt has required me to work both with and beyond the now conventionalised critical triumvirate of race, class and gender, asking why it is that my own critical discourse at various moments wishes to privilege one figure over another and, also, why it has become crucial for the cultural critic to experiment theoretically with adventurous intersections amongst these three doxa.

Here, in defining my field and method of study, I have been inclined to draw on Morris's paradoxical logic in her essay "Banality in Cultural Studies". As I have already indicated, she cautions against a cultural criticism that churns out evermore manifold readings of minor cultural moments. At the same time, though, she argues that it is perhaps indeed 'banality' which needs to become a serious focus of cultural analysis. It is useful to wager, for example, that everyday, 'middle class' realities are to some degree inertial, characterised as much by stupidities, cowardices, failures of conscience, inabilities to imagine things differently and plain fatigue, as by spectacle. The everyday, in other words, does not derive solely from invention, pleasure, resistance and so on. Nevertheless, as both Morris (1990) and Kinser (1992) struggle to acknowledge, inertia "may function as positively as any conscious decision-making, however rationally, inventively, or stylishly informed" (Kinser 1992:81-82). It is here, perhaps confusingly, that the everyday of commodified forms such as magazines, malls and themed leisure functions in relation to the spectacular. This relation may be cast (by individual consumers and by the producers who would most visibly author consumer culture) as the ironic mockery of marketing spectacles that are banal, excessive, extravagant fantasy; but it may also find oddly meaningful conjunctures between regular shopping trips to the supermarkets of mega malls, and the dream of a life – 'lifestyles of the rich and famous' – that is dramatically liberated from the routine of work and family. Similarly, the relation may be manifest as a fascination for highly-mediated public personae whose lives are seen (and imagined) to be diametrically different from the mundane; yet it may also find transient moments of recognition in the celebrity figure, so that stardom resembles a humanly *mass*-mediated, everybody's ordinary. This Thesis asks that such elusive intersections in commodity culture between the ordinary and spectacular be given considered attention by intellectuals.

I have wished, here, *not* to efface my eclectic theoretical resources, my treating of ideas from various forms of deconstruction, critical theory, feminism and poststructuralism as found rather than as coherent knowledges. This is in part a signature of my own fragmented contemporary, dare I say postmodern, subjectivities; but it is also a gesture of intellectual circumspection, conveying the recognition that the Thesis constitutes as much my own 'intellectual biography' as the exploration of a body of knowledge, and that it has required wide-ranging foraging. I have seen this diffuse theoretical repertoire and method as an

acknowledgement that as a white South African, never mind white South African academic and teacher, I am situated at so many nodal intersections, so many irresolutions, that I cannot hope to speak authoritatively through any single authority, or authoritatively for any collective.

For example, although neither his argument nor critical purpose are fully congruent with my own, James Donald in his study of education and popular culture reminds the academic researcher of culture that it is in both “today’s lesson...[and] in watching the television tonight, that the singular dramas of authority and agency are played out. These are stories not just about reason and intentionality, but especially about the messy dynamics of desire, fantasy and transgression” (1992:15-16). My own wish to work on forms like magazines, malls and themed leisure, as an English Studies academic, then, derives from a need to search out new forms of cultural authority and expertise, even as it qualifies an intellectual authority by juxtaposing it with the authority of popular experience. Further, if magazines, malls and themed leisure resorts are forms in the first instance ‘beyond’ the academe, my decision to work on them connotes a belief that they may feasibly be the subject of academic hypothesis about the society which generates such forms. An academic enunciation cannot delineate the ‘whole’ meaning of such forms but, as a cultural consumption which is also a production of meaning, the academic reading of culture is part of a virtual whole. For my part, I proceed with circumspection even as it is futile to avoid the matter of critical opinion or ‘discrimination’. I make value judgements, yes, judgements which necessarily privilege certain positions and provisionally exclude others. But, in problematising “the sovereign right and imaginary autonomy [often] accorded to academic discourse” (Wark 1992:437), I work towards these judgements with difficulty and try to see my position as precisely that – one among many, and one with the kinds of provisional validity characteristic of contingent contexts. Dare I hope that with a little good fortune, my intellectual work may be praised along the lines of Meaghan Morris’s essay on malls (1993b), of which Wark remarks: one of the most interesting things is that she takes a great deal on board “and gets away with it. In multiplying the difficulties of finding a place and a rhetorical means to speak, Morris has improvised solutions” (Wark 1992:434), treating the question of feminism and everyday life, for instance, as an invitation to make up answers as she goes along. One of the most valuable points that Morris makes in the essay concerns the use of theory. She urges the researcher to “consider how it works in concrete social circumstances that inflect, in turn, its workings – and...to learn from that place, make discoveries, change the drift of one’s analysis, rather than use it as a site of theoretical self-validation” (1993b:306-7). It is in this spirit, then, that my theoretical plurality and self-reflexive autobiographical stance might be understood.

Whether remaining with or moving beyond my critical self, I cannot, of course, hope to trace exhaustively the significations of the forms of South African commodity culture on which I have chosen to focus. (Although, as is well illustrated in Chapter 4 on *The Lost City*, this has been the monumentalising critical temptation in my desire to demonstrate intellectual dexterity.) The implicit conceptual narrative of each Chapter, though, is that given the spectacle, generic and imaginative cross-referencing, image saturation and contextual proliferation which characterise the cultures of (post)modernity, *no* analysis, whatever its length and scope, could claim completely to have identified the aesthetic, ideological or other meanings of a cultural entity or process. Labels such as dominant, marginal, oppositional and so on are not unproblematically demonstrative of absolute subject positions, but are subject to negotiation, reworking, reimagining, and paradoxical correlation. As Nava explains, commodity culture and consumption do “not simply mirror production. Cultural forms and meanings are not reducible to class and the economic. Consumerism is far more than just economic activity: it is also about dreams and consolation, communication and confrontation, image and identity....[I]t consists of a multiplicity

of fragmented and contradictory discourses” (1987:209). I suggest, therefore, that any academic reading of the texts and events of South African commodity culture involves a process of signification in which there are momentary configurations of meaning and affiliation, shot through with dissolutions, residues, reformations, traces. This destabilises assumptions about the one-dimensional, expedient strategies through which Ideology and the Market are extended, and represents a critical space into which an English Studies critic might step so as to offer innovative, and perhaps more compassionate, readings of contemporary South African consumer culture.

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