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Introduction

The articles in this edition of *Design Issues* track, illuminate, and reflect on the influences and trajectories that have shaped and are shaping South African design practice and production. In so doing, they succeed in highlighting the dualities and dilemmas of continuity and change in the development of design in this country and its reactive relation to unique cultural, social, and economic circumstances in both historical and contemporary contexts.

Three clusters of ideas are predominantly interwoven into the articles. The first of these is the extent to which design, in practice and in manifest form, has been molded by two major impulses. These are, primarily, the country's colonial history, essentially the political, educational and cultural dominance of Britain as well as the later ideologies of apartheid which many view as a form of internal colonialism, and secondly, design's intersection with corporate and consumer capitalism as powerful economic and cultural forces. Current debates and creative tensions between Africanism, South Africanism, localism and internationalism dictate and ensure that there is no easy path ahead and that it is not possible to view or review design within any single framework or category. The co-existence of opposites, ambiguity and contradiction demand a fluidity that crosses conceptual barriers and that questions the once secure boundaries that separated one category from another.

The second cluster of ideas relates to transformation and how this concept has been instrumental in promoting design thinking, action, dialogue and reflection by encouraging changes in focus, priorities, interests, allegiances and methods. The articles underscore just how deeply embedded in the South African psyche are the seminal events and themes that inform the new democratic dispensation brought about by the dismantling of the apartheid system. There is a keen sensitivity to the tremendous cultural variety of the country, a growing understanding of the value of indigenous knowledge and a clear articulation that the incorporation and recognition of previously marginalized groups in the design industry and design education are matters of some urgency.

The final cluster of ideas reflects a willingness to confront and understand the multifaceted contributions that design can make in many arenas. Achievements, opportunities, directions and options apparent in the design domain are delineated in the articles. The role and potential of design that emerges from these deliberations is comprehensive. Design is positioned not only in terms of products and symbols, but also in relation to policies, systems and interac-

tions. The need for designers in South Africa to demonstrate and develop the potential of design by working with government agencies, large corporations, private enterprises, educational institutions and local communities is unequivocal.

While common ideas link the articles, the scope and range of their subject matter is relatively wide. The intimate relation of the built environment to identifiable ideological underpinnings is examined by two authors. Two broad based commentaries of design developments, particularly during the last decade as South Africa embarked on a new dispensation, offer some assessment and evaluation of design's progress and its current state. In the two final articles, descriptions of design thinking and activities in the operational arena provide an insight into the pragmatic engagement with the challenges posed by contemporary circumstances.

Frederico Freschi and Jeanne van Eeden take the built environment in historical and contemporary review. Freschi considers the façades of some commercial buildings designed by architect William Grant Hood in the central business district of Cape Town during the inter-war period. He indicates how the iconographic meanings of the façades may be seen as a response to the South African urban context and the concept of modernity as the qualifying characteristic of corporate expansion and identity in colonial South Africa. Van Eeden highlights the continuing influence of the colonial legacy and its assertion in popular South African culture. She points to the perpetuation of mythical and stereotypical views of Africa in the articulation of space and the structuring of narrative for a prominent South African theme park and suggests that these tactics obscure the multifaceted nature and diversity of the country's culture and history. She emphasizes the necessity for engagement with issues such as identity in a more critical and sustained manner and proposes that South Africa represent itself with images and stories that reflect its diversity more candidly.

Ian Sutherland and Marian Sauthoff maintain that South African design is indeed starting to exploit the rich iconic nature of its diverse histories and visual culture and blend this with new material, technology and global trends in sometimes startling and unique ways. Sauthoff and Sutherland consider not only how manifestations of design echo, bear witness to and promote new considerations of identity, diversity, and transformation in South Africa. They also expose how design practice and education are under close scrutiny in a number of forums inside and outside the design arena in attempts to address historical problems and grapple with contemporary complexities. Both authors are complimentary and critical, suggesting that while much has been achieved, much still needs to be done.

Throwing the design net wider than the local context, Thomas Oosthuizen maintains that South African marketers and designers cannot avoid globalization nor easily choose their own path into the

future. What they can do is think and create innovatively to meet global competition on its own terms. He suggests that the divisive nature of South Africans as shown by their whole history, may be their greatest strength if only they can turn this weakness into an understanding that harnesses the inherent value encapsulated in the multiplicity of cultural forms and contexts prevalent in South Africa. Based on experience in the communications arena, Oosthuizen provides some practical guidance on how communicating across cultures may be approached.

Kate Wells, Edgard Sienaert and Joan Conolly reveal the power of collaboration and the importance of acknowledging socio-cultural milieu. They describe how a jointly conceived and undertaken HIV/AIDS intervention project was able to integrate design, development and communication strategies with indigenous knowledge, value systems and traditional craft skills to meet the needs and aspirations of a group of women in a rural KwaZulu-Natal community. Informed and sensitive to the women's needs, and truly embraced by the intended beneficiaries, the project has given impetus to sustainable economic development, pride and self-actualization.

In 1992 Clem Sunter, chief scenario planner and then chairman of the Gold and Uranium Division of the Anglo American Corporation, described South Africa as a microcosm of the world. He suggested that the problems and complexities facing the nations of the world as they strive to create better societies, are directly and proportionately mirrored in South Africa. Success in understanding these complexities and solving particular problems thus provides a wonderful opportunity for South Africa to contribute insights and to share experiences with developed and developing nations. Could one extend this aspiration to the more specific context of design? Does design from the periphery have something to offer? The articles in this edition would suggest that the potential is there: ideas from the periphery are multiple, pertinent and possess the capacity to enrich understanding and challenge design thinking beyond the borders of South Africa.

Guest Editors
Marian Sauthoff
Ian Sutherland



Figure 1

William Hood Grant

Photo: SA Advertising Contractors Ltd, *The Colosseum Theatre Cape Town: Souvenir Programme* (Cape Town: Cape Times Ltd., 1938), 7.

Form Follows Façade: The Architecture of W. H. Grant, 1920–1932 ¹

Federico Freschi

The Scottish-born architect William Hood Grant (1879–1957) designed a significant number of buildings in and around Cape Town. This article considers the façades of some of Grant’s (and his contemporaries’) commercial buildings in the Central Business District (CBD) during the inter-war period, tracing the genealogy of stylistic changes from the highly derivative classicism of the teens and 1920s to the “modernistic” art deco style of the 1930s. It considers the iconographic meanings of the façades in terms of first, the notion of an appropriate response to the South African (and more specifically Capetonian) urban context, and, second, the concept of “modernity” as the sine qua non of corporate expansion and identity in colonial South Africa.

William Hood Grant (figure 1) was born in Dundee, Scotland in 1879. In 1898 (1900²), after serving an apprenticeship with a local architect, he immigrated to Cape Town. He rapidly established himself in the thriving architectural scene in Cape Town, taking up a position as a draughtsman in the office of the well-known English architect Ransome.³ In 1903, he went into partnership with his compatriot and colleague, McGillivray,⁴ and became a Fellow of the Cape Institute of Architects in 1910. The partnership with McGillivray proved to be a very fruitful one. They collaborated on a number of buildings, establishing the meticulous attention to detail, judicious interpretations of contemporary styling, and standard of craftsmanship that were to become characteristic of Grant’s work during the 1920s and 1930s.

McGillivray and Grant were successful in various competitions, among other things, for several buildings in the province of Natal, as well as for the Norwich Union Buildings and the Long Street Baths in Cape Town. They also were responsible for the design of several suburban schools—including those at Mowbray and Woodstock—which Picton-Seymour attributes to their “having gained for themselves a name for making the very best use of a particular site, paying special regard to its economic and convenient use.”⁵

Among their important works in Durban were the Southern Life and the African Banking Corporation buildings, the elaborate façades of which combined fashionable art nouveau decoration with Edwardian Renaissance classicism. Although this conflation of art nouveau and classical styling has important implications for the

- 1 A shorter version of this article was delivered at the 13th Annual Conference of the South African Association of Art Historians, September 1997. I am grateful to William Bell of the Glasgow University Archives for making available biographical material on W. H. Grant, and to John Egan for sharing his reminiscences of the 1930s in Grant’s offices.
- 2 Grant’s obituary in the *Dundee Courier* lists the date of emigration as 1900, while that in the February 1957 *Architect and Builder* lists the date as 1898.
- 3 Ransome immigrated to South Africa from England in 1880, after becoming an Associate of the Royal Institute of British Architects. He was responsible for the design of a number of commercial buildings in Cape Town.

later development of Grant's mature style, in its original context, it provided an interesting counterpoint to the pre-eminence of Herbert Baker's contemporary arts and crafts inspired experiments with the Cape Dutch vernacular.

The McGillivray and Grant partnership was dissolved in 1923, after the completion of the Argus Printing and Publishing Company Building in St. George's Street (the first of whose buildings, incidentally, had been designed by their former employer, Ransome, in 1895). Grant set up an independent practice, continuing to operate from the offices at 132 St. George's Street, which he had occupied since 1914. During the 1930s and 1940s, he occupied offices in buildings designed by himself, first in the General Assurance Building from 1926 to 1933, and then across the road in the Commercial Union Buildings, from which he continued to work until his semi-retirement in 1950. During this period, he was responsible for the design of a significant number of commercial buildings in the Cape Town city center, numerous suburban residences, hotels, blocks of flats and factories, and, through his association with Johannesburg entrepreneur I. W. Schlesinger, several cinemas in and around Cape Town. He died at Hermanus, near Cape Town, in 1957.

Grant's 1920s Style

By the 1920s, Grant had formulated a characteristic style, at once entirely derivative of the prevailing Edwardian classicism espoused by Herbert Baker and Edwin Lutyens, and yet showing a number of vigorous stylistic refinements, developed during his years with McGillivray, which were increasingly synthesized into the elaborate "modernism" of his 1930s style. Grant's claims to modernity—like those of many of his contemporaries—rested entirely on the stylistic refinements of his façades. Thus, if the contemporary European modern movement was (at least partly) predicated on Louis Sullivan's notion of "form following function," then it seems to follow that Grant's brand of modernity is more accurately characterized by "form following façade!"

The effect of rampant commercialization and expansion in Cape Town during the 1920s and 1930s was remarkable, transforming the scale and appearance of the CBD. Zoning regulations for the most part inhibited the proliferation of the "skyscrapers" that characterized contemporary Johannesburg,⁶ but changing perceptions about the nature and function of ornamentation substantially altered the appearance of the CBD which, by the 1930s, was concentrated around the relatively small area surrounding the length of St. George's Street.

Nonetheless, the most significant shift was in terms of scale, with the average height of commercial buildings increasing from a maximum of six stories to ten, while the pseudo-classical façades of the 1920s were challenged and eventually ousted by the robust influence of American skyscraper culture. The CBD was the terrain on

4 McGillivray; according to D. Picton-Seymour, *Victorian Buildings in South Africa Including Edwardian and Transvaal Republican Styles 1850-1910* (Cape Town: Balkema, 1977), 107, came to South Africa from Scotland "on account of ill health." After serving his articles, that is he served his apprenticeship, (i.e., he was an "articled clerk") in Scotland, he worked under John Johnson in London. Upon his arrival in Cape Town, he worked first with John Parker before taking a position as managing assistant in Ransome's office.

5 D. Picton-Seymour, 108.

6 For a critical discussion of the development of the 1930s "skyscraper style" in Johannesburg, see F. Freschi, "Art Deco, Modernism and Modernity in Johannesburg: The Case for Obel and Obel's 'Astor Mansions' (1932)," *De Arte* 55 (1997): 21-35.



Figure 2 (above)
 McGillivray & Grant, Norwich Union Building
 Unless specified otherwise, all photographs
 were taken by the author



Figure 3 (above right)
 McGillivray & Grant, Argus Printing and
 Publishing Co., 1922

which architectural novelty vied with traditionalism to proclaim the corporate identities of banks, insurance companies, and large corporations.⁷ As Willis notes in her discussion of commercial architecture in New York and Chicago (and the same may well be said of the burgeoning South African cities of the 1920s and 1930s), “[c]entral business districts ... must be understood as complex, competitive commercial markets where space is a commodity, and location and image count.”⁸

In these terms, Grant’s contribution to the architecture of this area may be seen as indicative of his status. Apart from the Norwich Union and the Argus Printing and Publishing Company buildings, which were designed in partnership with McGillivray,⁹ he designed the General Assurance and the Commercial Union buildings, both with frontages on St. George’s Street, and Shell House in Greenmarket Square. Boston House on Strand Street, Jackson’s Showrooms on Long Street, and the OK Bazaars Building on Plein Street made significant statements at the outer boundaries of this important commercial thoroughfare. (By the end of the 1930s, this list would include the Del Monico Restaurant as well as the Colosseum cinema.)

The earliest of these buildings, the Norwich Union Building of 1907 (figure 2), combines classical forms with art nouveau details and elements of Mackintosh’s somewhat more restrained Glaswegian style. This refinement of the classical vocabulary is in-

7 As early as 1923, the *South African Builder*, (August 1923, page 19) described St. George’s Street as “the finest street in Cape Town for handsome buildings,” and continuing, “[w]e do not think there are many cities in the world which can boast of so many fine looking edifices in a street so short as St. George’s Street ... without taking into consideration some of the older buildings which have a dignity of their own.”

8 C. Willis, *Form Follows Finance: Skyscrapers and Skylines in New York and Chicago* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1995), 145.

9 Grant designed substantial additions and modifications to the Norwich Union Building in 1926, and the Argus Building throughout the 1930s.



Figure 4
Grant, Argus Building,
detail of *holbol* volutes, 1922

teresting in terms of establishing a reference point of cosmopolitan modernity outside of the ubiquitous influence of Herbert Baker's Cape Dutch revival style which, at that time, had a firm grasp on the South African architectural establishment. The Argus Printing and Publishing Company Building of 1922 (figure 3), on the other hand, conforms more consistently to the prototypes for commercial buildings developed by Baker and Masey in Cape Town at the turn of the century. The nearby Rhodes Building of 1902 and the National Mutual Life Building of 1905, for example, implicitly emulated the empirical response to climate and context generated by Baker's arts and crafts inspired experiments with the Cape Dutch vernacular. The references to the latter in the Argus Building are obvious: the shuttered windows, plaster scrolls, and *holbol* (concavo-convex) volutes around the doorways and at the ends of the architrave above the first floor level are typical of the style, but above this the references are more consistently Italianate (the arched windows, pilasters, and balustraded balconettes (figure 4).

This conflation of the two styles provides interesting parallel readings in terms of the appropriateness of form to context. The references to Cape Dutch architecture obviously evoke what is considered "an essentially South African spirit," since "[Cape Dutch architecture] possess[es] types, which are naturally suited to our South African climate and to our special South African needs. They seem to fit in naturally with their surrounding. They are elegant and pleasing, yet simple."¹⁰

It is clearly these references to a quintessentially "South African" tradition that Grant intended to exploit. The massive palazzo architecture, however, allows the building a certain cosmopolitan, European sensibility. The latter is, ironically, also considered by some contemporary commentators to be particularly suited to the South African context, in so far as "in arriving at a happy solution to the problem of developing a South African style, we could not do better than to turn to Italy and the Renaissance movement [*sic*] for inspiration. The open cortile, the heavy cornices, and the piazzas and belvederes were all the type of thing which naturally developed in a land where there were blue skies, and an abundance of sunshine."¹¹

Thus, the building may be seen in contemporary terms as clearly historicist and conservative in its intentions, embodying the spirit of colonial domestic architecture on a scale commensurate with corporate identity in the urban context.

Italian Revivalism: The General Assurance Building

The General Assurance Building (figure 5), completed to Grant's design in 1925, is more consistent with the Italian Renaissance influence than with the Dutch, designed in the style described by Rennie as "Cape Revival Italianate."¹² The constraints of the long and narrow site lent itself to a greater vertical emphasis, and thus, possibly, away

10 *South African Builder* (March 1920): 15.

11 *South African Builder* (November 1923): 25.

12 J. Rennie. *The Buildings of Central Cape Town: Volume Two: Catalogue*. (Cape Town: Cape Provincial Institute of Architects, 1978), 109.



Figure 5 (above)
Grant, General Assurance Building, 1928



Figure 6 (above right)
Grant, Shell House, 1940

from the implied horizontality of the Dutch vernacular. The verticality is expressed chiefly in terms of the campanile-like tower on the corner of St. George's and Longmarket Streets, which disrupts the implied symmetry of the Longmarket Street elevation, and originally allowed the structure to project well above the surrounding buildings. The vertical conceit is further reinforced not only by the attached giant order columns between the fifth and sixth floors, but also by the columnar chimneys which project above the cornice of the St. George's Street façade, terminating in Ionic scrolls. With the exception of this tower, the treatment of the Longmarket Street façade does not depart substantially from the Argus model. In this instance, however, the reference to Cape Dutch styling is vestigial, being evident only in the solid shuttered teak leaded casements, while the general character of the building is a more consistent—if somewhat mannered—evocation of the Venetian Renaissance. The compact and rectilinear plan, medallions, masks, balustraded balconies, spandrels, and grand order columns clearly evoke a sense of a Venetian palazzo, while the projecting cornice with its decorated brackets and tiled roof is generally common to Italian High Renaissance architecture.

The reference to the Venetian Renaissance is explored more self-consciously in Shell House, extensively remodeled by Grant, first in 1929 and again in 1940 (figure 6). The *South African Builder*, in fact, describes the first of these renovations as resulting in a structure “distinctly reminiscent of the Venetian Palaces of the late Renaissance ...[with] features that are suitable and harmonize with others in the locality.”¹³

The existing three-story structure was converted into a six-story building with an attic story. Although the exterior walls facing Longmarket Street and Greenmarket Square were retained, the façade was entirely remodeled. Apart from the first two stories, where the plaster was colored and heavily grooved in order to give

13 *South African Builder* (August 1929): 27.



Figure 7 (above)
Grant, the Waterkant Street elevation of
Boston House as it appeared in 1929



Figure 8 (above right)
Burnet, Adelaide House, London, 1929

the appearance of rusticated stone, the building was faced with brilliant white stucco. The whiteness of the façade was relieved by the insertion of courses of red brickwork separated from one another by broader courses of white stucco, while the entrance was flanked with stone columns and pilasters with bronze caps. Continuing the impression of palatial luxury was the main hall, paneled throughout with white marble. The use of Italianate forms, apart from affording a treatment that was considered suitable to the South African climate, also carry the historic associations of having housed a commercial aristocracy in the Renaissance. In both instances, this lends a vicarious historical weight to the public face of contemporary corporate culture. (The 1940 remodeling incorporated the clock tower, bring the building's corporate identity in line with that of the company's head office building on the Embankment in London.)

Into the Thirties: Boston House

Boston House, completed in 1929 (figure 7) departs from this model, effectively presenting a burgeoning sense of modernity. The L-shaped site has frontages on both Strand and Waterkant Streets, the former faced with stone-colored terra-cotta, and the latter with white stucco, with courses of red brickwork at the uppermost stories on both façades. Apart from the *faux*-rusticated base and entrances, running fret ornament on the architrave and the acanthus mouldings on the cornice, the façades are relatively uncluttered, and thus expressive of the underlying reinforced concrete structure. Symmetrical towers terminating in step parapets surmounted by

flagstaffs replace the Roman tiled roofs of the 1920s, while the cornice is cantilevered shelf-like between the towers. In short, Boston House seems to abandon the formal and iconographic concerns of the Cape Italian Revival style in favor of a more up-to-date and cosmopolitan aesthetic. As a superficial comparison with John Burnet's Adelaide House (figure 8) in London, completed in the same year, reveals, the overall appearances of the building is consistent with contemporary trends abroad.

The ostensible "modernity" of Boston House may be partly accounted for in view of the fact that it was built as a speculative investment by the Garlicks Company, and therefore was not designed to communicate the specific identity of an anchor tenant. This in turn affected the plan since, before the introduction of fluorescent lighting in the 1940s, the quality and rentability of office space largely depended upon sufficiently large windows and high ceilings, which allowed daylight to penetrate as far into the interior as possible. Windows thus are a design imperative, and this is communicated in the façade. Paired, with corner pane and criss-cross details at the top floors, windows establish a rhythm across the bays, while the grouping of offices to large light areas and side lanes results in one side of the length of the "L" having what are virtually ribbon windows. Thus, while the careful consideration of design elements in both corporate and speculative office blocks generally is expressive of the cultural conceits of the buildings' owners, in the example of Boston House, they primarily are a commercial strategy to promote highly profitable rental space in the increasingly congested CBD.¹⁴

Although the change in stylistic values exemplified by this and other examples, including the Jackson's Warehouse and Showrooms Building of 1930, seem to indicate a shift in contemporary tastes, classical revivalism remained the officially sanctioned style in Cape Town in the early 1930s. Black and Fagg's Standard Bank of 1930 and James Morris's South African Reserve Bank Building of 1929, for example, were awarded the Institute's Bronze Medals in 1931 and 1932, respectively. Both buildings clearly evoke the iconography of Renaissance classicism as appropriate to financial institutions in the CBD. The bronze gates, window grilles, and internal shutters (and not least the inclusion of the Medici coat of arms!) of the latter carries overt connotations of permanence, authority, and power.

The Art Deco Style in Cape Town

The officially sanctioned conservatism of these buildings notwithstanding, architectural taste in the 1930s was, as is demonstrated by the examples of Boston House and Jackson's Showrooms, showing signs of imminent change. One of the earliest buildings to show a definitive break with historical revivalism is Kimberley House (figure 9) by Roberts and Small, completed in 1930. The building clearly pays lip service to classical conventions in terms of its

14 Indeed, actual rentable space within the building was considerable: the upper floors, ambitiously interpreting the standard formula developed during the 1920s, were divided into approximately forty offices which in turn could be sub-divided into suites as required. The building also was unique in that it incorporated a tenants' garage in the basement.



Figure 9
Roberts & Small, Kimberley House, 1930



Figure 10
Grant, Commercial Union Building (now
Market House), 1932

rusticated base and projecting cornice, with incipient egg-and-dart moldings and fret ornamentation. Its general character, however, is more expressive of the so-called “modernistic” or eclectic commercial style, emerging from the fringes of *beaux-arts* and modern movement architecture, which has retrospectively been labeled “art deco.” The *South African Builder*, articulating this conflation of the contemporary and the historical, described the building as “show[ing] in its detail traces of the present-day tendency in design. There is no imitation of the details of any past period, and yet each component part is architecturally treated *in such a manner as has been done at some time in the past* [my emphasis]. All the details blend harmoniously and with very decidedly individualistic treatment.”¹⁵

Implicit in this discussion seems to be the idea that this “present-day tendency” is communicated as much in terms of the decorative details, as in the implied structural “honesty” of the treatment of the concrete structure—or, more simply put, a clear case of form following façade.

The brilliant white façade is delicately framed with a fine line of black tiles, zigzagging as it approaches the cornice. The undersides of the balconies are treated with a diamond-like geometrical pattern, at once reminiscent of the Italian Renaissance convention of articulated balcony struts while, at the same time suggesting the reinforcement of slab construction (thus implicitly acknowledging a certain degree of structural “truth”). This “diamond” motif—appropriate to the eponymous home of the South African diamond industry—is repeated symmetrically on the moldings on either side of the topmost balconette, here resembling stylized classical medallions, as well as in the wrought iron railings of the balcony, the vestibule flooring, and the fanlights. The use of these obviously “modernistic” elements clearly serves to identify the tenant as progressive, cosmopolitan, and urbane.

Grant’s Commercial Union Building of 1932 (figure 10) marks a decisive break with historical revivalism in his commercial work. Nowhere on the elaborate façades of the building, uniformly and lavishly decorated in the Greenmarket Square, and on the Shortmarket and St. George’s Streets elevations, is there any appeal to the classical. The *South African Builder* gave a lengthy description of its appearance, and enumerated its stylistic virtues, proclaiming that in this building “modernism in design almost ‘in excelsis’ [had] come to Cape Town.”¹⁶ It commented further that “[s]ome other buildings recently erected in the Mother City in the modern manner show less restraint than that under notice, which has the distinction of being fresh and nonimitative.”¹⁷

A later issue praised its “stately appearance” and “very modern character.”¹⁸ Cumming-George reiterates this sentiment, describing the building as “imposingly modern” with “fine decorative modern stonework” on the façades.¹⁹

15 *South African Builder* (June 1930): 3.
16 *South African Builder* (September 1932): 3.
17 *Ibid.*
18 *South African Builder* (February 1933): 21.
19 L. Cumming-George, *Architecture in South Africa: Illustrated with Photographs, Drawings, and Plans, Volume 1*. (Cape Town: Specialty Press of South Africa, 1933), 95.

Certainly no expense was spared in terms of realizing the approximately £30,000 building. The concrete framed structure has a black marble plinth facing, with bush-hammered pink Transferral granite and cream-colored, pre-cast stone facings. The lofty groined entrance hall (reminiscent of Boston House) is walled with travertine marble, the floor originally was finished in golden tone mosaic, while the shops in the square are sheltered by a concrete veranda supported by a green terrazzo colonnade.²⁰ Furthermore, an elaborate ten stories from ground to topmost parapet, the building was at the time then the tallest building in the CBD.

The extensive decorations of the façade, consisting of both low and high relief moldings in precast stone, are eclectic in origin, and effectively one of the finest examples of the art deco style in Cape Town. In its attempt to concoct a “modernist” vocabulary, devoid of classical or conventional references, this style emerged as a true hybrid, borrowing extensively from various sources. This tendency had been most clearly and dramatically expressed in the New York skyscraper architecture of the mid-1920s, where the development of novel forms had arisen partly from the zoning ordinances of 1916, which required certain setbacks from predetermined levels above the street. The nature and appearance of ornamentation, consequently, also underwent a dramatic change: although the *beaux-arts* disposition towards symmetry and ornamentation as being fundamental to architectural aesthetics *per se* still dictated the general appearance of contemporary structures, the vocabulary of ornamentation no longer was confined to the classical. As a primarily commercial style, the new skyscraper aesthetic embraced a variety of stylistic sources in its attempts to fulfill the requirements of good advertising. In her discussion of the skyscraper style in New York and Chicago, Willis points out that “[m]ost corporate headquarters also lease a major portion of their buildings to outside tenants ... [therefore, she argues] ... all skyscrapers ... can be viewed as real estate ventures, either as income-generating properties or as long-term investments in high-value urban.”²¹

It seems as if the appearance of the building, by extension, was (and is) as important as the arrangement of its internal space in terms of attracting clientele—the equation may seem simplistic, but obviously obtains: the more attractive the building, the better the class of commercial tenants.

In these terms, it is easy to understand why the decorative details on the façades of the Commercial Union Building have no direct bearing upon the commercial activities conducted within. It is impossible, therefore, to trace any direct iconographic link between the decorative program as a whole and the ostensible function of the building as corporate headquarters with space to let, although the use of elaborately “modern” forms clearly identified the corporation as progressive, cosmopolitan, and urbane. The details are, nonetheless, interesting in themselves: the elaborate play

20 This lavish architectural treatment of the ground floor shop fronts is partly attributable to the fact that shops generally yield much higher rents than offices.

21 C. Willis, 146.



Figure 11 (above)
Grant, Commercial Union Building, detail of stepped parapets, 1932



Figure 12 (above right)
Grant, Commercial Union Building, detail of stylized *bas-relief* eagles,

of geometric forms along the stepped parapets are reminiscent of Aztec decorative motifs (figure 11), while the elaborate medallions, corner moldings, spandrels, and zigzags evoke the contemporary interest in quasi-expressionist geometric forms. The styled *bas-relief* eagles flanking the entrances (figure 12) are more obviously reminiscent of American public works architecture while, at the same time, dramatically celebrating the user-oriented aspects of the building. The eagles are linked by a continuous band of low-relief moldings representing stylized protea flowers (figure 13) which are, once again, iconographically ambiguous. On the one hand, they may serve to anchor the building in its South African context while, on the other hand, the geometric nature of the flower lends itself well to stylization in this manner.

John Egan,²² who worked as a draughtsman in Grant's office during the 1930s, and who was responsible for the drawings from which these details were produced, describes Grant's working method as follows: "[w]e both seemed to have similar ideas of detail and [he] left a lot of his ideas to me. He did not do any drafting himself ... [i]f he sketched out something I would work it up for him."

As for the actual origin of the decorative details themselves, Egan describes how "Mr. Grant took bits and pieces from various things that appealed to him."²³ The latter included details from the American journal *Architectural Forum* to which Grant subscribed, as well as details from the interiors of the ships docked in the harbor. Once the designs were completed, the Salt River Cement Works cast the moldings. Egan relates that "[b]oth [the Salt River and the Union Cement Works] had Italian fellows who [were] artistic and made plaster of Paris templates from our designs."²⁴

Although this account implies that—in contemporary terms at least—the iconography of the façade is nothing less than gratuitous, I would argue that it is nonetheless iconographically significant. First, in terms of establishing the rhetoric of "modernity" as

22 John Edward Egan, FRIBA (b. 1906) also worked in the offices of F. M. Glennie, and set up his own practice in Cape town in the early 1950s, which lasted until his retirement in the late 1970s. Egan (personal communication, July 29, 1997) also relates how, since Grant was left-handed, they would sometimes work on the same drawing: "On a very large, detailed drawing, he did the lettering on the left side and I on the right."

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.



Figure 13
Grant, Commercial Union Building, detail of
façade moldings, 1932



Figure 14
Louw & Louw, SANLAM & SANTAM Building,
1932

the *sine qua non* of contemporary corporate culture, this radical shift away from historical revivalism marks a definitive break with the image of Cape Town as a minor (albeit strategically important) colonial outpost with an extended village-like character. In its place, the vision of Cape Town as a twentieth-century skyscraper city was born, a notion which was to have a profound impact on subsequent urban planning and the eventual, disastrous, removal of the CBD to the reclaimed area of the foreshore in the late 1950s.

Secondly, freeing the façade from the shackles of historical ornament paved the way for the construction of an alternative and more contemporary iconography, within the broader rubric of which the notion of a South African design identity could be further explored and redefined. While the case for the “South Africanism” of the “protea” motif on the Commercial Union Building is, as I have shown, at best tenuous and at worst entirely gratuitous, the iconographic possibilities of the new stylistic language were beginning to be confidently explored elsewhere.

“South Africanism”

The SANTAM and SANLAM Building (figure 14, now known as “Waalburg”), completed to the designs of Louw and Louw in the same year as the Commercial Union Building, is a case in point. Rising sheer from the street to a height of seven stories, the impres-



Figure 15 (above)
Quail, *Versorging* (literally translated this means “to take care of”), precast concrete panel, 1932



Figure 16 (above right)
Quail, *Sport*, precast concrete panel, 1932

sion of a dominant verticality is reinforced by the treatment of the pilaster-like bays, which terminate in a step-pyramid configuration. The spandrels in the bays are decorated with a variety of low-relief bronze and precast concrete decorative panels which repeat across both the Wale and Burg Street elevations, succeeding, according to *Die Huisgenoot*, in counteracting the potential for “monotony” latent in the “simplicity that distinguishes a building like this one.”²⁵

Designed by the sculptor M. Quail, these panels serve to symbolize the nature and functions of the companies that occupy the building,²⁶ with symbolic representations of “Trust,” “Care,” and “Fruit[fullness],”²⁷ as well as sport, industry and agriculture in a quasi-expressionistic, figurative style (figures 15 to 16). Of particular interest are the bronze panels below these, which *Die Huisgenoot* described as “[p]ure African motifs which express the Afrikaans character of the firms. Bushmen with knobkieries and charging Kaffirs with rawhide shields and assegais, cactus plants, bunches of grapes, proteas, ostriches, etc., are stunningly represented thereon.”²⁸ (figure 17)

The equation of “modernity” with ideology and the construction of national (and, more specifically, Afrikaner) identity thus is expressed in a very self-conscious way. The lavish use of color in the interior of the building also can, according to *Die Huisgenoot* be equated with construction of a South African identity, since, in contrast to the “greyness of the northern countries under whose influence our architecture stands,”²⁹ The brightly colored decorations in the ceiling coffers of the vestibule “agrees with the character of the building, with the wealth of luxuriantly colored flowers and clear blue skies of our sunny South Africa.”³⁰ These same ideas informed

25 *Die Huisgenoot* (September 1932): 47. My translation of: ‘Dit is begryplik dat’n eenvoud soos die wat hierdie gebou kenmerk, maklik tot eentonigheid kan lei. Daar is derhalwe gepaste versierings aangebring.’

26 SANTAM and SANLAM are South African financial institutions.

27 *Die Huisgenoot* (September 1932): 47.

28 *Ibid.* My translation of: ‘...suiwer Afrikaanse motiewe wat uitdrukking gee aan die Afrikaanse karakter van die firmas. Boesmans met knobkieries en aanstormende Kaffers met skildvel en asgaai, kaktusplante, trosse druiwe, proteas, volstruise, ens., is treffend daarop uitgebeeld.’

29 *Ibid.* My translation of: ‘...grouheid van die noordelike lande onder wie se invloed ons boukuns staan.’



Figure 17
Quail, African motifs, bronze, 1932

a great deal of Louw and Louw's work throughout the 1930s and 1940s, finding their greatest expression in Cape town in the elaborate façade of the Old Mutual Building, completed in 1941.³¹

Grant's façades, however, were never concerned in as direct and self-conscious a way with the ideological posturing of Afrikaner (or, indeed, South African) nationalism *per se*. His was primarily and literally a commercial architecture: his buildings are flamboyant, fashionable, and oriented around visual impact—the most salient manifestation of novelty. This is not to suggest that Grant's work therefore stands outside of ideological constructs—far from it—but rather that he is operating from *within* the dominant discourse of English colonialist capitalism. The appeal to modernity, therefore, was primarily in commercial terms, and its assumptions of cultural dominance were seemingly unchallenged (particularly in Cape Town, where the number of English-owned or -controlled companies far outweighed those of Afrikaans companies).

It is clear, however, that the Commercial Union Building marks a decisive break with historicism in Grant's work. His buildings from 1933 onward are exclusively in the "modernistic" style, and the strategic importance of the sites on which they were erected in the city ensured that their characteristically fashionable façades were well-known and well-publicized. Ultimately, it is clear that the technical and aesthetic processes initiated by Grant and his contemporaries in the 1930s are an unequivocal expression of urban self-consciousness and the desire to articulate capitalist cosmopolitanism in the vocabulary of modernism. Despite the implicit appeal to functional aesthetics, however, form inevitably still followed façade.

30 Ibid. My translation of: "...strook met die karakter van die gebou, met ons sonnige Suid-Afrika se weelde van blomkleure en sy helderblou hemel." See F. Freschi, "Big Business Beauty: the Old Mutual Building, Cape Town." *Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 20 (1994).

31 For a more detailed account of the nationalistic iconography underpinning the decorative program of the Old Mutual Building, see F. Freschi "Big Business Beauty: The Old Mutual Building, Cape Town, South Africa," *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 20 (1994): 38-57

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The following journals were widely consulted. Where relevant, specific references have been given in the text:

Architect Builder and Engineer

Die Huisgenoot

The South African Architect

The South African Architectural Record

The South African Builder

The Colonial Gaze: Imperialism, Myths, and South African Popular Culture¹

Jeanne van Eeden

Introduction

This article considers how imperialism, neocolonialism, and the stereotypical myth of Africa collide in popular culture at The Lost City, a South African theme park (figure 1). It argues that many of the visual and textual mechanisms that are used to suggest the notion of mythical Africa at this theme park can be traced back to the colonial gaze and the imperialist project. It has been suggested that certain colonialist codes of spatial organization have been internalized by the popular imagination, and surface in the manner in which theme parks habitually articulate space and structure narrative. The relevance of these ideas for the creators, consumers, and critics of entertainment spaces such as The Lost City is that these fantasy images position Africa in a specific manner as the site of consumption and entertainment. In so doing, entertainment landscapes have the capacity to effectively obscure true culture and history. In a post-modern world governed by postindustrial, multinational capitalism, it can be argued that an entertainment economy tends to choose the lowest common denominators, the most obvious stereotypes by which to render other cultures. This article suggests that these strategies are by no means innocuous, and are founded on ideological assumptions and mythic constructs that position The Lost City and, by extension, Africa as a definitive hallucinatory space of the colonial imagination. Indeed, it seems ironic that, while buzzwords such as postcolonialism and political correctness ostensibly inform interaction with culture and history, the colonial legacy continually asserts itself in popular culture and reinscribes a politics of power in the entertainment landscape.

The theoretical underpinnings of this article are briefly outlined before a few salient points regarding theme parks and The Lost City are sketched. The mechanisms by which colonial powers exerted authority over colonial spaces then are examined in relation to The Lost City, substantiating the notion that cultural production is invariably ideologically inflected.

¹ This article is based on a paper delivered at the IcoGrada Continental Shift 2001—World Design Convergence Congress in Johannesburg, 11-14 September 2001.



Figure 1
Aerial view of the Lost City The Lost City at Sun City (Johannesburg: Sun International, 2000), 15.

- | | | | |
|----|-----------------------------|----|-----------------------|
| 1 | The Palace of the Lost City | 21 | Beach |
| 2 | The Sand Pool | 22 | Water Slides |
| 3 | The Crystal Court | 23 | Temple of Courage |
| 4 | Villa Del Palazzo | 24 | Slide Hill |
| 5 | Statue of Shawu | 25 | Adventure Mountain |
| 6 | Royal Staircase | 26 | The Sacred River |
| 7 | Rain Forest | 27 | Food Court |
| 8 | Forest Walks | 28 | Sweet Discovery |
| 9 | Adventure Path | 29 | Monkey Spring Plaza |
| 10 | Crocodile Pool | 30 | Bridge of Time |
| 11 | Gong of the Sun Lion | 31 | Lost City Golf Course |
| 12 | Bacaranda Forest | 32 | Lost City Club House |
| 13 | Lake | | |
| 14 | Hippo Pool | | |
| 15 | Spider Web Bridge | | |
| 16 | The Royal Baths | | |
| 17 | Observation Bar | | |
| 18 | Islands | | |
| 19 | Amphitheatre | | |
| 20 | Roaring Lagoon | | |

Theoretical Framework

This article takes a critical view of a contemporary entertainment landscape, namely The Lost City, thereby following the critical stance that interrogates Disney theme parks.² Cultural criticism only recently has seriously questioned the capacity entertainment has to perpetuate ideological constructs. This approach still is fairly undertheorized in South Africa, but more and more academics are examining entertainment landscapes and leisure spaces such as theme parks, casinos, and shopping malls, and are asking what role these spaces play in postcolonial South Africa. Alternate readings of cultural products are always possible, and indeed imperative, but for the purposes of this article a specific interpretation is made to illustrate one way in which the built environment colludes in stereotyping Africa, in a type of colonialism predicated on the visual. This article utilizes a post-disciplinary approach to the investigation of the cultural construction of meaning, and thus borrows freely from colonial discourse analysis, cultural geography, postcolonial studies, and cultural studies. All of these approaches grapple with issues such as systems of representation, power, and cultural hegemony, which are deeply implicated in the articulation of The Lost City.

It is recognized that modernism, capitalism, and colonialism are all associated on some level and, by extension, postmodernism, postindustrial capitalism, and neocolonialism also can be correlated. According to Zukin, multinational corporations such as Disney (or equally Sun International, which is responsible for The Lost City) have the power to impose their vision on landscape, and therefore the world is rendered, represented, and inflected in a way that reflects power structures and ideologies.³ Accordingly, The Lost City can be interpreted as a neocolonial landscape: its creators largely ignored the historical, geographical, and demographic imperatives of the land where it was sited, and constructed a fantasy landscape that encourages a distorted reading and consumption of the past.⁴ Entertainment landscapes increasingly form the backdrop against which popular culture is experienced and enacted, and blur the lines between leisure, entertainment, and commerce through the skillful marketing of fantasy and consumption. Foucault's belief that space is "fundamental in any exercise of power" assumes agency in the enunciation of an "architecture of pleasure"⁵ such as The Lost City, and this tenet underlies the arguments expressed in this article.

Roland Barthes's explication of contemporary myth also is implicit in this article, since he considers that images and words are equally complicit in generating texts of mythological weight.⁶ He postulates that the apparatus of myth naturalizes, renders innocuous, and legitimates social constructions. Mythic discourse invariably reduces things to the simplicity of essences or stereotypes, and "freezes into an eternal reference" that which it wishes to justify.⁷ The "white mythology" of colonial discourse is an example of a text that consolidates and encodes legitimating myths or meta-narratives.

2 This critical discourse includes seminal works such as E. Smoodin, ed. *Disney Discourse: Producing the Magic Kingdom* (London: Routledge, 1994) and K. Klugman, J. Kuenz, S. Waldrep and S. Willis, *Inside the Mouse: Work and Play at Disney World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

3 Sharon Zukin, *Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disney World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

4 It should be recognized that a critique of The Lost City by no means negates the benefits that have been derived from it, such as employment opportunities and, more recently, social upliftment programs.

5 Michel Foucault "Space, Power and Knowledge" in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, Simon Doring, ed. (London: Routledge, 1993), 168.

6 Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (London: Paladin, 1972), 117-174.

7 *Ibid.*, 136,156,169.

Barthes implies that the ideological functioning of myth serves the interests of a group or society. Myth appropriates and “has at its disposal an unlimited mass of signifiers” that reinforce each other.⁸ A construct such as “the myth of Africa” therefore is never founded on only one set of premises, but rather on a network of similar signifiers. Barthes believes that, when something such as landscape is appropriated by society, it becomes an empty signifier, and gains different ideological connotations, dependent upon its new mythic functions. Barthes further believes that myth dehistoricises as part of its apparatus of power.⁹ History accordingly is a noticeably absent referent at *The Lost City*; the constructed myth of Africa hinges on time-honored stereotypes of Africa as an exotic, receptive, timeless space, a *tabula rasa* waiting to be filled by the imperialist imagination.

Theme Parks

Theme parks are invented or contrived landscapes that operate according to specific social and symbolic practices that manipulate space, culture, and history in some manner. For the purposes of this article, it suffices to note a few generic characteristics of theme park entertainment. Most important, theme parks usually pivot around the creation of a spurious past, or a nostalgic pseudo-history that encourages omissions and silences. Furthermore, theme parks invariably construct an elaborate hyperreal simulacrum¹⁰ that is underpinned by the sophisticated choreography of space by means of themed architecture, a themed environment, and a narrative. In order to exclude reality, theme parks produce controlled, hermetic environments that dislocate space and time; and they fabricate an ambiance that connotes fun, fantasy, adventure, and escapism. It is suggested in this article that the complicated means by which *The Lost City* structures space and narrative can be compared to the strategies followed by imperial powers in inscribing and controlling colonized space. This creates an interesting confluence between two textual and ideological systems, namely theme park entertainment and colonialism. These, in turn, intersect with a third discourse: tourism, which can be viewed as a contemporary brand of colonialism.¹¹ *The Lost City* operates within the conventions of popular visual culture (including intertextual references to Tarzan, Indiana Jones, and other fictional texts). Consequently, it refers implicitly to entrenched coded systems of representation that situate the spectator in a space that resonates with colonial nostalgia. These ideas will now be illustrated in relation to *The Lost City*.

8 Ibid., 129.

9 Ibid., 131,132.

10 Two decisive texts that deal with the notion of theme parks as simulacra are Umberto Eco's "Travels in Hyperreality" in *Travels in Hyperreality: Essays* (London: Pan, 1986) and Jean Baudrillard's "The Precession of Simulacra" in *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

11 It is interesting to speculate whether the origin of theme parks in 1955 (Disneyland in Anaheim, California) and the increase in tourism from the 1960s onwards are related, in some ideological manner, to the concurrent worldwide dismantling of colonialism.

The Lost City

South African leisure entrepreneur Sol Kerzner¹² first envisioned the Sun City destination resort, consisting of a hotel, casino and entertainment complex in 1978. When Sun City opened in 1979, it was the first resort of its kind in Africa, and the first large-scale equivalent of a Las Vegas model of entertainment in South Africa. Since this resort was conceptualized around gambling and risqué entertainment, then banned in South Africa, it was sited in a neighboring black homeland of apartheid South Africa, Bophuthatswana. By the early 1990s, Kerzner's ideas regarding organized entertainment had become more sophisticated. He consequently created The Lost City theme park and The Palace Hotel on the Sun City site in 1992. The Lost City inclines more overtly towards the Disney theme park model of entertainment, which is usually theme- or narrative-driven, and includes notions regarding architectural coherence, illusionism, cleanliness, crowd management, and family togetherness.¹³ Since the deregulation of gambling in South Africa in 1996, many new casinos have been built in metropolitan areas, causing serious competition for Sun City, which consequently has laid more emphasis on its theme park component.

The Lost City resulted from the systematic conceptualization and instrumentalization of space, as well as marketing strategies that provide the visitor with a prepackaged vision of exotic, mythical Africa. Hence, it is promoted as "Africa's kingdom of pleasure, where fantasy becomes reality." Kerzner chose Gerald Allison of the American firm Wimberly Allison Tong & Goo, known for their contribution to the hospitality, leisure, and entertainment industries, to realize his image of mythical Africa. Allison previously had been involved with projects for the Disney Company, and summed up his brief thus:

The Lost City [is] a fantasy world in the heart of South Africa. The client specified a luxury hotel of unprecedented opulence and originality. The 68-acre site, in the midst of a volcanic crater 100 miles from the nearest urban center, was unremarkable and the area technologically primitive. The challenge sparked a literary blueprint: A fictional narrative of a mythical lost kingdom became the basis of design, and all public areas and guestrooms carry out this theme.¹⁴

Allison also formulated the now (in)famous "Legend of the Lost City," which effectively scripts and defines the preferred reading of the site. An abbreviated version of The Legend reads:

Centuries before tall ships were ever dreamed about, long before the dawn of a Western civilization, a nomadic tribe from northern Africa set out to seek a new world, a land of peace and plenty. The tribe wandered for many years in search of such a magical place, and at last their quest was rewarded. The land they discovered to the south became

12 Sol Kerzner (born 1935) has become known outside South Africa for two leisure developments: the Mohegan Sun gaming resort in Connecticut, opened in 1996, and the Atlantis resort in the Bahamas, relaunched in 1999.

13 R. M. Weinstein, "Disneyland and Coney Island: Reflections of the Evolution of the Modern Amusement Park," *Journal of Popular Culture* 26: 1 (Summer 1992): 131-164, offers an overview of the most important generic characteristics of theme parks.

14 "Hotels & Resorts: The Palace of The Lost City" at www.watg.com/lostcity.html, 1997.

the legendary valley of the sun, known today as the Valley of Waves. Not only did they bring with them a rich culture, but also architectural skills which were exceptional even by today's standards. Something special was created: from the jungle rose an amazing city with a magnificent Palace, a world richer and more splendid than any they had ever known. Then a violent earthquake struck this idyllic valley, the survivors fled, never to return and left it to be found and restored by archaeologists centuries later.¹⁵

The whole validation for The Lost City hinges on the Legend and the notion that this mysterious civilization was tragically destroyed more than three thousand years ago, and that its romantic ruins were discovered by the intrepid explorer, Sol Kerzner. Carter reasons that *space* is transformed into specific *place* precisely through the intervention of texts.¹⁶ Accordingly, once a space such as The Lost City is invested with a textual identity, it becomes a textualized landscape. This makes it difficult to disengage it from its textual identity, or indeed to recuperate a more authentic identity.

The rest of this article will position this idea within the framework of colonial ideology. The colonial project controlled landscape and space by means such as the following. First, it invoked the genres of exploration, discovery, and archaeology to validate the colonial enterprise. Secondly, it used techniques such as naming and mapping to appropriate space and impose systems of surveillance. Third, it often rendered the colonized land picturesque in accordance with Western aesthetic conventions. All of these methods have been enacted, perhaps unconsciously, at The Lost City, thereby situating it in a cultural code that romanticizes an imperialist endeavor. It is important to bear in mind that these mechanisms of colonial control reverberate in the cultural code of visitors to The Lost City precisely because of the mediatory role of popular culture such as films, which created the stereotypical visual lexicon by which Africa is recognized to this day.

Ideology, Space, and Power

Spatial experience intersects with issues such as power, status, ideology, myth, representation, identity, capitalism, the representation of the past, leisure, and entertainment. Not only is the manipulation of space an integral part of postmodern entertainment landscapes, it also was a component of colonialism that inflected landscapes in accordance with colonial narratives, since imperialism required other countries to almost become readable, like a book. It is recognized that landscape has the capacity to encompass cultural, political, social, and economic meanings.¹⁷ Barthes, for instance, believes that the ideological underpinnings of landscape are naturalized, and justify the dominant values of society in the form of myth. Since Sun City is situated in a site fraught with colonial and postcolonial conflicts

15 "Fact sheet: The Palace" (Johannesburg: Sun International, 1997), 1.

16 Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay. An Essay in Spatial History* (London: Faber, 1987), xxiii.

17 J. Duncan and D. Ley, "Representing the Place of Culture," in *Place/Culture/Representation* J. Duncan and D. Ley, eds. (London: Routledge, 1993), 11.

- 18 Andrew Bank and G. Minkley, "Genealogies of Space and Identity in Cape Town" *Kronos. Journal of Cape History* 25, at www.uwc.ac.za/arts/ihr/kronos/editorial.html, 1-2, 6. The current consumption of Otherness is manifested in "sextourism," which typically is a continuation of the sexual privilege accorded to colonial adventurers, but now under the auspices of tourism. For an examination of how Africa became a vast leisure landscape for the West, see J. N. Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).
- 19 Elizabeth Delmont and Jessica Dubow, "Thinking Through Landscape: Colonial Spaces and their Legacies" in *Panoramas of Passage: Changing Landscapes of South Africa* (Johannesburg: University Art Galleries, University of the Witwatersrand, and Washington, DC: Meridian International Center, 1995), 10.
- 20 Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 4-5; Martin Hall, "The Legend of the Lost City; or, the Man with Golden Balls," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 21:2 June, 1995.
- 21 Martin Hall, "The Legend of the Lost City," 181.
- 22 Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 204.
- 23 John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze. Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London: Sage, 1990), 96.
- 24 NuMaps *Bird's Eye View of The Lost City* (Cape Town: NuMaps, 1996).
- 25 Martin Hall, "The Legend of the Lost City," 190, 193.
- 26 Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Traveling Writing and Transculturation*, 219; Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, 321.
- 27 Henry Louis Gates, "Into Africa with Henry Louis Gates: Lost Cities of the South." Television program broadcast on South African television in August 1999 (emphasis added).
- 28 Z. Sardar, "Do Not Adjust Your Mind: Postmodernism, Reality, and the Other," *Futures* 25: 8 (October 1993): 889.

and contested histories that are endemic to the South African situation, it is automatically implicated in Barthes's "ideological sediments" of colonialism. Landscape can be the locus for the formation of cultural or national identity; it can either be a link with the past, or (as at The Lost City) it can effectively obscure or nullify the past. This is significant in South Africa precisely because the politics of apartheid located power relations in the landscape. There is a long history of racial segregation in both South African work and leisure spaces, and Otherness and ethnicity frequently have been positioned as sites of spectacle, entertainment, and consumption.¹⁸ The intersections between space, displacement, and nationalism, and the "topographies of colonial and apartheid power"¹⁹ consequently are being redrawn in contemporary South Africa. The cultural meaning of The Lost City accordingly is situated precisely in the fact that its politics are retrograde.

Exploration, Adventure, and Archeology

The colonial landscape was customarily enframed to reflect the superior power of the colonizing nation; this started with the discovery of the land. The colonial travelers and explorers of the nineteenth century generated the genre of travel- and exploration-writing that celebrated the ideology of imperialism for readers in Europe.²⁰ This convention also can be identified in the Legend of The Lost City, since it tells of the quest of the Ancients for a magical land. Travel writing was aligned with disciplines such as archaeology, anthropology, and ethnography, which were concerned with the discovery, classification, description, and recuperation of other cultures. The Lost City fits comfortably into this genre, since its "ruins" reputedly were discovered by the "archaeologist and custodian ... Sol Kerzner ... the creator, discoverer, and interpreter of this Enchanted Ruin."²¹ Kerzner's identification with a romanticized Indiana Jones-figure was so complete that the press often referred to him as "Indiana Sol of the Lost City of Bop." Pratt makes the point that a discovery "only gets 'made' for real after the traveller ... returns home, and brings it into being through texts: a name on a map ... a diary, a lecture, a travel book."²² Kerzner's "discovery" therefore was made tangible by the hotel-as-text. The cultural resonance elicited by the use of archaeology is important, since not only does it allude to the Indiana Jones mythology, it also positions archaeology as *recuperation* of a lost civilization.

From the late nineteenth century onwards, archaeology was firmly allied with the romance of colonial adventure in the popular imagination, manifesting in the quests, discoveries, and explorations typified by Rider Haggard's novels *King Solomon's Mines* (1885), *Allan Quatermain* (1887), and *She* (1887). A latter-day version of this notion is tourism, since it perpetuates the romantic gaze, which intersects with the lure of archaeological mystique at sites promoted in terms of adventure and discovery.²³ The Lost City, for instance, has desig-

- 29 Mapungubwe is an Iron Age archaeological site located in the Northern Province of South Africa. It is believed to have been inhabited by the Shona people, who are the descendants of the builders of Great Zimbabwe and the founders of the Monomotapa empire. Trade with the Far East thrived at Mapungubwe during the Middle Ages, and the kingdom became known particularly for its golden artifacts. The first artifacts were discovered in 1928, and the archaeological excavations were entrusted to the University of Pretoria in the 1930s. Henry Louis Gates and C. Weinek ("The Hills Are Alive," *Mail & Guardian Friday*, March 3-9, 2000, page 3) contend that the age and significance of the site were denied by the South African authorities since they could not condone proof of the existence of sophisticated Iron Age communities in South Africa, which negated the white mythology of an empty land. The first permanent exhibition of the Mapungubwe artifacts was opened by Minister Ben Ngubane at the University of Pretoria on 19 June 2000. At the time of this writing, Mapungubwe was nominated as a World Heritage Site. For pictures of artifacts from Mapungubwe, see mapungubwe.up.ac.za/history_body.htm
- 30 Martin Hall, "The Legend of the Lost City," 188-193.
- 31 Deborah Root, *Cannibal Culture. Art, Appropriation, and the Commodification of Difference* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1996), 152.
- 32 Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 61; David Bunn, "Embodying Africa: Woman and Romance in Colonial Fiction." *English in Africa* 15: 1 (May 1988): 9.
- 33 Elizabeth Delmont and Jessica Dubow, "Thinking Through Landscape," 12; J. Duncan, "Sites of Representation: Place, Time, and the Discourse of the Other," in *Place/Culture/Representation*, J. Duncan and D. Ley, eds. (London: Routledge, 1993), 50. This imperial discourse also systematically feminized Africa in much the same manner that Orientalism gendered the Orient.
- 34 J. M. Coetzee, *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa* (Sandton: Radix, 1988), 177.

nated "adventure paths" and "trails of discovery" in the Garden that ostensibly involve the spectator in "exploration." The map of The Lost City states that "a modern explorer stumbled upon the Lost City" and that the map "will help you discover the hidden treasures of The Lost City for yourself."²⁴

Archaeology played an important part in structuring the colonial romance, and frequently was deployed to sanction the practices of imperialism. Hall comments that archaeology and imperialism conspired in offering "verification of some of the oldest images of Africa; the inevitability of inspiration from the north, and of the shallowness, poverty and violence of Africa's own history."²⁵ The Legend of The Lost City perpetuates this by negating local history (the inhabitants of The Lost City ostensibly came from North Africa), replacing it with an artificial Disneyfied "diorama history." It indeed was common for the colonial mindset to intimate that other parts of the world had no history or culture,²⁶ and likewise the architect Allison pronounced that there was *no significant architectural history* in the area where The Lost City was built.²⁷ Sardar condemns the relativism of Postmodern thought vigorously, and contends that since "all texts are embedded with narrative or story-telling interests, it is not possible to distinguish between factual and documented writing of history from fiction, imaginative, and simulated events. There is no possibility of ever unearthing the truth about the histories of all Others."²⁸ It is ironic that the heroic age of archaeology, from the late nineteenth century to the 1930s, led to the discovery of "real" lost cities in southern Africa, including Great Zimbabwe and Mapungubwe.²⁹ But the hegemonic complicity between archaeology, imperialism, and politics divested many sites of their significance for African history,³⁰ until the dismantling of apartheid politics in the 1990s.

The Empty Land

Once colonial adventurers, explorers, and archaeologists had appropriated a territory, its status as a possession had to be expressed. The first stratagem was to proclaim the emptiness of the land, thus justifying the Western occupation of "unused" land.³¹ These landscapes would be rendered meaningful only because of capitalist intervention, and the spatial metaphors of both colonialism and adventure literature were based on the enunciation of capitalist values.³²

By summoning up the image of a *tabula rasa*, the vast, empty, pristine landscape of Africa was made receptive to the European imperial drive.³³ The myth of an empty landscape was sanctioned by "[o]fficial historiography [which] ... told ... of how until the nineteenth century ... the interior of ... South Africa was unpeopled."³⁴ This spatial metaphor of an "empty country" also is suggestively conjured up in a Sun City brochure: "the olive-green and ochre slopes of the Pilanesberg mountain range in Bophuthatswana in southern Africa lay sleepy and untouched under the blazing Africa

sun ... where once only black eagles rose on the midday thermals and the shy duiker scurried through the undergrowth."³⁵ Similarly, the Legend of The Lost City implies the uninhabited state of the land where the gentle tribe from the North settled. Moreover, people are not represented visually at The Lost City, apart from a few small paintings, reminiscent of the so-called "Bushman" art. This elision accords with that genre of travel writing that described the flora and fauna of a place, but which marginalized, or indeed negated, human presence³⁶ for ideological reasons.

Surveying the Land

The process of controlling the land always was contingent upon sight and surveillance, which indicates that conquest was as much cognitive as military.³⁷ The notion of the possessive gaze is linked to the manner in which landscapes were presented for visual consumption by the traveler's eye, which is analogous to the "imperial eye ... that by seeing names and dominates."³⁸ The desire of the colonial gaze was to create self-referential, enclosed spaces of power wherein the "confident assurance of entitled leisure" could be played out.³⁹ Delmont and Dubow suggest that the enclosed colonial space lent itself to "the invention and imaging of a particular mythology,"⁴⁰ and in this respect The Lost City creates an hermetic stage on which the colonial metanarrative can be *reenacted* in a space dedicated to "entitled leisure."

The colonial landscape was invariably staged in a theatrical manner for the panoramic eye of the possessor, creating an imperial history that "reduces space to a stage [where] ... [t]he primary object is not to understand or to interpret: it is to legitimate."⁴¹ Landscape thus was deployed as spectacle, and the omniscient viewer was situated in a detached Olympian position. The process of transforming landscape into scenery renders it a site for romantic contemplation, and suspends the constraints of temporality.⁴² This convention also resonates at The Lost City, since everything has been conceptualized and landscaped to provide predictably charming views, breathtaking scenes, and romantic pensive spaces, in a location that suggests the timelessness associated with mythical Africa. Promontory descriptions and the monarch-of-all-I-survey syndrome were nineteenth-century gendered colonial tropes that signaled male power and presence in the land.⁴³ The elevated point of view typical of the colonial gaze is imitated in the pictorial maps of The Lost City, which use the rhetoric of staging and perspectival vision to position the viewer as the lone surveyor (and consumer) of the empty land. Interestingly, when Michael Jackson expressed interest in buying into Sun City in 1999, the press replicated this conceit by captioning his photograph "master of all he surveys."

35 Marilyn Poole, *The Palace of the Lost City at Sun City, Republic of Bophuthatswana, Southern Africa* (Cape Town: Struik, 1993), 3.

36 Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 51.

37 Jessica Dubow, "Bringing the Country into View: Baines and the Making of the Colonial Picturesque." (Paper presented at the University of Cape Town, January 1997); Elizabeth Delmont and Jessica Dubow, "Thinking Through Landscape," 11.

38 J. M. Coetzee, *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa*, 174.

39 Elizabeth Delmont and Jessica Dubow, "Thinking Through Landscape," 14-15.

40 Ibid.

41 Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, xv-xvi, xix.

42 J. Smith, "The Lie that Blinds. Destabilizing the Text of Landscape," in *Place/Culture/Representation J.* Duncan and D. Ley, eds. (London: Routledge, 1993), 78-79; T. Cusack, "Migrant Travellers and Touristic Idylls: The Paintings of Jack B. Yeats and Postcolonial Identities," *Art History* 21: 2 (June 1998): 214.

43 Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 205, 213, 216.

Naming the Land

A further device that constituted the colonial landscape was the “power of naming.”⁴⁴ A country had to be discovered and named to come into cultural circulation, and naming authorized the extension of colonial space through language.⁴⁵ Naming, as an ideological construct, therefore was a fundamental gesture whereby space was transposed into specific place. Naming is empowering, since it equates knowing with naming, and in this objectification of the world, the language of white men was deemed superior in mastering the land.⁴⁶ There is a double naming at The Lost City: first, the Ancients themselves ostensibly named their new environment with suitably evocative names such as the Sacred River, the Lake of Peace, and the Bridge of Time. Second, according to the Legend of The Lost City, “The Valley of the Ancients and The Lost City were the names the expedition leader gave to his discoveries. The true names of The Palace and The Hall of Treasures came to light when a parchment scroll, entitled The Annals of the City, was unearthed during initial excavations.”⁴⁷

The Picturesque Land

The discovery and naming of colonial space were tangible procedures, whereas the representation of the land according to an aesthetic trope, such as the picturesque, was more oblique. The relevance of this is that the picturesque bears certain clear resemblances to the creation of narratives in theme parks landscapes such as The Lost City. By invoking the aesthetic category of the picturesque, colonial space was rendered familiar and manageable, since it domesticated and presented nature according to a Western schema of representation. Delmont and Dubow imply that the picturesque was a deeply coded form of representation, since it offered the “foreign landscape brought into ‘being-for-the-gaze.’”⁴⁸ The picturesque hence can be understood as a method of spatial organization that encompasses the creation of bounded colonial spaces,⁴⁹ which moreover is related to the hierarchical spatial articulation found in theme parks that privileges certain modes of visibility and prescribes the unfolding of narrative.

The picturesque was defined as an aesthetic category in late eighteenth-century England, and like the sublime, denoted the exaggeration of nature in some manner.⁵⁰ Since picturesque means “like a picture,” pictorial models were invoked as examples of how to look at nature.⁵¹ The picturesque was singularly important in architecture and landscape gardening, specifically in the gardens of “Capability” Brown. The picturesque garden signified a “garden of ideas,” since it evoked languorous melancholy and nostalgia through the complex staging of rocks, water, trees, broken or uneven ground, mountains, cascades, pavilions, and mock ruins.⁵²

44 Ibid., 33.

45 Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, xviii, 67.

46 Ibid., 8-9, 63.

47 “The Legend of The Lost City” (Johannesburg: Sun International, 2000).

48 Elizabeth Delmont and Jessica Dubow, “Thinking Through Landscape,” 7, 11.

49 Ibid., 13; Jessica Dubow, “Bring the Country into View,” 1.

50 S. Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 74.

51 C. Hussey, *The Picturesque: Studies in a Point of View* (London: Cass, 1967), 4, 9.

52 Ibid., 152; Robert Rosenblum *Transformations in Late Eighteenth Century Art* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974), 114; J. M. Coetzee, *White Writing*, 46.

Since water and ruins are particularly potent images in the lexicon of the picturesque, they feature prominently at The Lost City. (It bears pointing out that all the water features and ruins at The Lost City were fabricated to conform with the script demanded by the Legend.) Water conventionally is associated with romantic notions of infinity, reflection, and contemplation. Ruins usually are connected with transience, the triumph of nature over human culture, retrospection, nostalgia, melancholic thoughts, and romantic solitude. The picturesque ruin and decay seem to validate the fact that The Lost City originated thousands of years ago.⁵³ This has a two-fold function: it perhaps suggests that these were “white ruins,” whereas the presence of the ruins also *legitimizes* or *proves* the truth of the Legend, thereby naturalizing the mythic construct. One also can speculate that the nostalgia, melancholia, and nihilism associated with ruins echo in the depthlessness and eclecticism of postmodern architecture, reflecting a world deprived of spirituality and fixed meaning.⁵⁴ Furthermore, ruins, nostalgia, melancholia, and the simulacrum all ponder on the loss of meaning: according to Baudrillard, “melancholia is the fundamental tonality ... of current systems of simulation ... melancholia is the inherent quality of the mode of the disappearance of meaning.”⁵⁵ This loss of meaning perhaps is endemic to leisure spaces such as The Lost City that create a generic and bland sense of “pastness” that satisfies the nostalgic hankerings of postmodern consumers.

The picturesque garden traditionally incorporates quirks of nature and literary allusions, and is designed pictorially, signaling important correspondences with landscapes such as The Lost City that are created around a text. The picturesque aesthetic modality is governed by nostalgic sentimentalism, imagination, spontaneity, visual appeal, surprise, transience, and variety. The picturesque usually is *envisioned* as a series of planned and composed static pictures, which are meant to be seen from specific viewpoints.⁵⁶ This is reminiscent of what Mitrasinovic calls the “thescapes” that result when space is divided into narrative structures at theme parks.⁵⁷ Carter notes that the picturesque is akin to punctuation in the landscape, causing the viewer to stop and reflect,⁵⁸ which again is similar to the manner in which space is organized and planned for predetermined effect at theme parks. The picturesque formula divides landscape into background, middle-distance, and foreground to render it readable for the viewer, by using the Western notion of perspectival planar recession. This echoes the views of the designer of the Garden at The Lost City, Patrick Watson, who stated that in a romantic landscape such as the Lost City, “the view 100 kilometers away is important ... the vista has to fade out, from tropical at the center to indigenous mountainside at the edges.”⁵⁹

Since the picturesque is indicative of human intervention and staging of the landscape, it is an excellent example of what Barthes would call mystification and the ideological manipulation of scen-

53 M. Silverman, “Sun King’s Lost City, Walts and All,” *The Weekly Mail* September, 4-10, 1992: 30.

54 J. Roberts, “Melancholy Meanings: Architecture, Postmodernity, and Philosophy” in *The Postmodern Arts. An Introductory Reader*, N. Wheale, ed. (London: Routledge, 1995), 139.

55 Jean Baudrillard, “The Precession of Simulacra,” 162.

56 M. Sullivan *The Meeting of Eastern and Western Art from the Sixteenth Century to the Present Day* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1973), 112.

57 M. Mitrasinovic, “Theme parks” at <http://web.new.ufl.edu/~wtilson/miograd.html>, 1998.

58 Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, 254.

59 “Works of Wonder,” *Habitat* 114 (February/March 1993): 50.

ery. The Garden at The Lost City is clearly a romantic “garden of ideas,” since it is structured around picturesque iconography such as crumbling ruins and water. The meticulous planning of picturesque vistas thus is clearly analogous to the articulation of space in theme parks, and conspires to encourage a specific reading of the textualized landscape. The picturesque is above all a marker of a civilized landscape, arranged painstakingly to render only those effects desired by the script. Consequently, all the paths in the Garden at The Lost City are paved, marked, signposted, and maintained, and no matter how dense the foliage, The Palace Hotel is nearly always reassuringly visible.

Mapping the Land

Maps are a fundamental part of the metaphorical organization and representation of space, and since they are part of the discourse of colonialism, they are automatically implicated in power relations. Maps traditionally are provided to visitors at theme parks, and generally carry forth the narrative in some manner. Not only can it be established that maps can be read as manipulative instruments of power, but also that they collude in constructing the terrain they presume to reflect. Promotional maps generally “construct a mythic geography, a landscape full of ‘points of interest,’”⁶⁰ and Soja adds that “[c]olourful pictorial maps ... [are] convenient for the exaggerated representations of presences and absences.”⁶¹ This type of map intersects with the ideology of capitalism most clearly, since it indicates spaces of consumption, whether touristic, leisure, or commercial.

In terms of cultural geography, maps can be held subject to textual interpretation as they are culturally encoded mental constructs.⁶² The scientific discourse of cartography presents a “scaled representation of the real ... based on a one-to-one correspondence of the world and the message sent and received.”⁶³ Maps operate from the principles of similitude and mimesis, but also are influenced by the cultural context and political, religious, and social values.⁶⁴ Since maps are constructed images, they can be vehicles for distortion, interpretation, propaganda, and suggestion, or so-called “persuasive cartography.”⁶⁵ Maps function according to rhetorical conventions that may select, omit, simplify, classify, include, or exclude information in keeping with a particular gaze,⁶⁶ and space typically is presented in a hierarchical manner that favors authority.

Maps are believed to function hegemonically to legitimate power structures, which can be traced back to Foucault’s discursive triangle of knowledge, space, and power. Thus, not only does power inform map-making, but power emanates from maps.⁶⁷ A topical critique of cartography concerns mimesis, since Western strategies of perspective and representation, which ostensibly granted direct access to knowledge, have invariably been privileged.⁶⁸ Critics such

60 J. B. Harley, “Deconstructing the Map” in *Writing Worlds: Discourse, Text and Metaphor in the Representation of Landscape*, T. J. Barnes and J. S. Duncan, eds. (London: Routledge, 1992), 241.

61 Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989), 237.

62 J. Pickles, “Texts, Hermeneutics and Propaganda Maps” in *Writing Worlds: Discourse, Text and Metaphor in the Representation of Landscape*, T. J. Barnes and J. S. Duncan, eds. (London: Routledge, 1992), 194.

63 Ibid.

64 J. B. Harley, “Deconstructing the Map,” 234, 236.

65 J. Pickles, “Texts, Hermeneutics, and Propaganda Maps,” 197, 193.

66 J. B. Harley, “Deconstructing the Map,” 243; J. Duncan and D. Ley, *Place/Culture/Representations*, 2.

67 J. B. Harley, “Deconstructing the Map,” 244-245.

68 J. Duncan and D. Ley, *Place/Culture/Representations*, 2; J. Pickles, “Texts, Hermeneutics, and Propaganda Maps,” 193; S. Ryan, “Inscribing the Emptiness,” in *Describing Empire: Postcolonialism and Textuality*, C. Tiffin and A. Lawson, eds. (London: Routledge, 1994), 115.

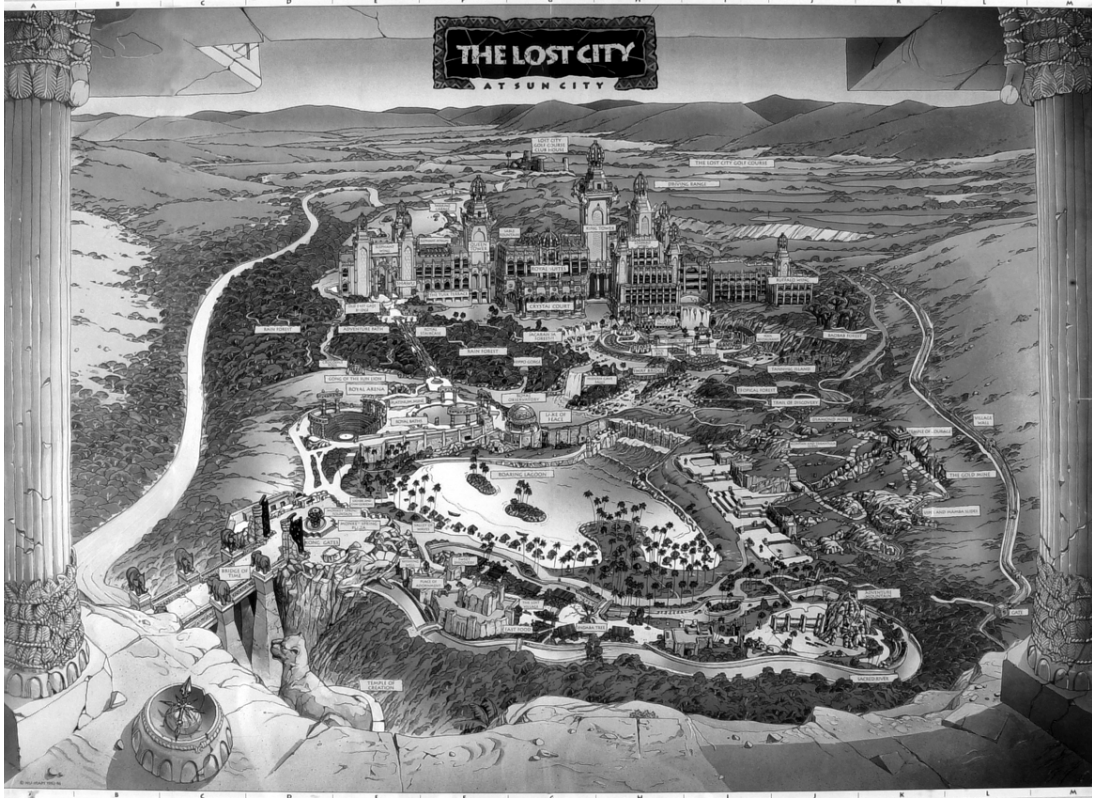


Figure 2
 Map of The Lost City, *NuMap of The Lost City*. (Johannesburg: Sun International, 1996).
 Original size 60 x 42cm.

as Sardar have deconstructed the West's obsession with mimetic representation, and indicate that it must be understood that the map is never the reality, since it is never a neutral equivalent.⁶⁹ This intimates that maps, supposedly premised on denotation, invariably invoke the connotative code, signaling that they can be interpreted as mythic and ideological constructs.

Two pictorial maps of Sun City and The Lost City illustrate these notions by privileging a Western, perspectival, totalizing gaze (figures 2 and 3). They present a three-dimensional, pseudo-naturalistic, disembodied bird's-eye view of the resort and its attractions. These maps are not, however, to scale, and the size of the features is manipulated at will. Both these maps have orienting compasses, grid references, and textual explanations on the reverse, which situates them in the discourse of promotional pictorial maps. Yet the graphic medium and the informal illustrative style, evoking fun and fantasy, represent and interpret rather than guaranteeing mimetic resemblance. These maps perhaps can be interpreted as simulacra, since the views they present ostensibly simulate reality, but conversely postulate a new reality. The specific vantage points chosen for depiction, for example from the lofty perspective of the Temple of Creation in the map of The Lost City, cannot be emulated by visitors, who are therefore presented with a predetermined, picturesque view that structures their perception. Seemingly once

69 Z. Sardar, "Do Not Adjust Your Mind."



Figure 3
 Map of Sun City, *NuMap of Sun City*
 (Johannesburg: Sun International, 1992).
 Original size 60 x 42cm.

the territory has been mapped, the visual abstract of the map not only orients and corroborates, but also shapes peoples' expectations, giving lie to its putative similitude.

The ideal picturesque view and colonial gaze are best reflected in the map of The Lost City (figure 2), which presents an omniscient, lofty view structured in the monarch-of-all-I-survey manner. The two proscenium-like columns direct the possessing gaze over the site, which unfolds like a narrative or panorama, and fades out into a pleasingly picturesque "luminous distance." This map excludes all reference to Sun City and the Entertainment Centre sections of the resort. The point of view focuses on The Palace Hotel, and there are telling distortions and omissions: the Vacation Club time-share resort and the delivery entrance to The Palace are totally elided, and the asphalt road is demoted to a rough dirt track. Furthermore, the height of the Bridge of Time is definitely exaggerated, and the rendition of picturesque aging at The Lost City is suggestively overstated. These misrepresentations sustain the fantasy of a timeless world: close to nature, passive, and the site of endless possibilities for the spectator. The reverse of this map carries an abbreviated form of the Legend of The Lost City, and takes the position of a travel guide, explaining (and mythologizing, in terms of Barthes) each site for the visitor. It colludes in the textual intervention in the landscape, by emphasizing the constitutive function of narra-

tive to structure experience. The map of Sun City (figure 3) does not exclude information to the same extent, but it also simplifies reality and focuses attention on The Lost City. The reverse of this map has textual information about the facilities of Sun City.

It is significant that the maps generated by theme parks bear traces of both colonial maps and promotional maps. Louis Marin instigated an inquiry into the narrative and ideological function of maps at Disney theme parks, and concluded that they structure the narratives, thereby constraining free interpretation by visitors.⁷⁰ More important, he postulated that through map, space takes on meaning,⁷¹ or as noted earlier, space is irrevocably transformed into place with a scripted theme, history, narrative, and meaning.

It previously was mentioned in this article that the colonial gaze postulated the white mythology of an empty land, which reified "space as a blank text, ready to be inscribed by the impending colonial process."⁷² Similarly, cartography systematized and naturalized the unfamiliar by means of an existing language, and therefore was a vital part of conquest, colonization, and the containment of power.⁷³ European imperial maps usually perpetuated the notion of the emptiness of the land, which not only hinted at its availability, but also the supposed lack of a history.⁷⁴ Indeed, many early maps of South Africa virtually obliterated "the presence of indigenous people... from the landscape."⁷⁵ Archaeologists, explorers, and colonial travelers were free to fill in the cartographic blanks with legend and myth.⁷⁶ The link between archaeology, cartography, and the colonial romance is significant, since novels such as Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* and *She* make explicit use of the map as a metaphor for "masculine colonizing zeal" in a feminized Africa.⁷⁷

This type of imperial map is epitomized by the fresco map in The Palace Hotel, since it presents an edited version of Africa's history and indigenous peoples. It depicts the vast African subcontinent, punctuated only sporadically with names such as Congo and Angola; virtually the whole of southern Africa is represented only by the one word Monomotapa and an iconic rendition of The Palace Hotel. An Italian inscription, which detaches it from an African context, dedicates the map to all the creators of The Lost City. This map effectively perpetuates the idea of the empty land, and shows conclusively how maps can dissimulate and fabricate.

Conclusion

This article has suggested that the colonialist strategies outlined above, as replicated at The Lost City, conspire in creating a vision of mythical Africa and perpetuate stereotypical views of Africa. The Western mind generally has represented Africa either as the Dark Continent and the white man's burden, or as the home of the exotic noble savage. The Lost City subscribes to the latter category by many sophisticated means that are beyond the scope of this article. The creators of The Lost City proclaimed that they wanted to repro-

70 Louis Marin, "Disneyland: A Degenerate Utopia," *Glyph* 1 (1977).

71 Ibid., 58.

72 S. Ryan, "Inscribing the Emptiness," 126.

73 J. B. Harley, "Deconstructing the Map," 242.

74 S. Ryan, "Inscribing the Emptiness," 126-127.

75 B. Rostron, "Redrawing Africa's Mind Map" *Mail & Guardian*, September 10-16, 1999: 29.

76 S. Ryan, "Inscribing the Emptiness," 124.

77 David Bunn, "Embodying Africa," 10-11; Martin Hall, "The Legend of the Lost City," 186.

duce the *essence of Africa*. In terms of postcolonial critique, the use of essentialist stereotypes to represent so-called Otherness is highly questionable. Neocolonialist capitalism exploits the mystical lure of other cultures worldwide, and The Lost City reverberates with imperialist texts in its controlled hermetic space that eliminates contrary narratives. Deborah Root points out that contemporary popular culture and tourism frequently betray a nostalgia for the “good old days of colonialism,”⁷⁸ and what concerns critics is that third world countries thereby are doomed to become the exotic playgrounds for Western tourists. The Lost City unequivocally colludes in this by effectively re-exoticizing Africa for consumption by a jaded postcolonial generation.

The dilemma is that tourism is essential to the economies of developing countries (including South Africa), but many tourists seem to prefer the clichéd statement and the romanticized image of other cultures, and the sway of the stereotype holds. The challenge for South Africans is to move beyond myth and stereotype, and in terms of the envisaged “African Renaissance” to engage with issues such as identity in a critical and sustained manner. Africa as a rule has been represented and constituted by the West, but now it must represent itself with images and stories that reflect its diversities more candidly than the saccharine confection of The Lost City. There is nothing essentially wrong with fantasy, but when it distorts, mystifies, obfuscates, and mythologizes culture and history, fashioning a kitsch simulacrum in their stead, the ideology underlying the fantasy machine becomes questionable. This trend is evident in the increasing conception of themed entertainment spaces such as Montecasino and Caesars Gauteng, which recreate mythical Tuscany and imperial Rome on the outskirts of Johannesburg. Barthes pointed out the power of myth, and the myth of Africa successfully consigns Africa to the status of entertainment; The Lost City reveals an insidious cultural politics of Africa that upholds the myth of a continent without its own culture or history.⁷⁹ The constructed history of The Lost City is invidious precisely because it fuses and confuses history, myth, and legend, creating a fairy-tale historyland for the wistful postmodern consumer.

78 Deborah Root, *Cannibal Culture*, 1996.

79 Cf. Martin Hall, “The Legend of the Lost City.”

Walking the Tightrope: Comments on Graphic Design in South Africa

Marian Southoff

The necessity for post-apartheid South Africa to establish and develop local markets, compete in the global marketplace, and meet the requirements of social reconstruction and development afforded opportunities to review and reassess the role of design in the country. In the early-1990s, coinciding with the start of the post-apartheid period, design commentators Kurlansky¹ and Oosthuizen² envisaged a significant economic and social role for design, as well as new demands for design skills. Both present design as a powerful national resource.

Oosthuizen called for “a new design order” based on a holistic and integrated vision of design purposes. This perception acknowledged the pivotal position of design in society, and its utilitarian and sign functions. It emphasized the need to foster the development of a South African design culture that combines global trends with the essential and differentiating qualities of Africa, and it elaborated on the idea of a design imperative in crafting a competitive edge for South Africa in both the national and international arenas.

Kurlansky drew parallels with countries including Germany, Japan and Spain which have faced similar challenges, and where design has underpinned an industrial and cultural renaissance. According to Kurlansky, who proposed a “new South Africa design initiative,” the significant role of design can only be actualized through the institution of a unique South African design culture. This includes a distinctive creative expression; acceptable standards of visual literacy at all levels of society; the accommodation of inclusive and representational perspectives; equitable staffing practices that acknowledge previously marginal groups within design industry sectors; and the support and promotion of high creative standards.

The complexity and diversity of the challenges confronting design practice in South Africa, initially defined in comprehensive proposals such as those of Kurlansky and Oosthuizen, preceded the proffering of a multitude of opinions, observations, and recommendations by practitioners and educationalists. A number of themes, each with a set of sub-themes, continue to animate deliberations about the progress and maturation of design in South Africa. Two themes that have been featured prominently in the exchange of ideas are South African identity and graphic design’s intersection with

1 M. Kurlansky, “New South African Design Initiative,” *Image & Text* 1 (1992): 11-14.

2 T. Oosthuizen, “Crafting a Competitive Edge: The Mission of Design in Post-Apartheid South Africa,” *Image & Text* 6 (1993): 13-19.

corporate organizations. While many points of concern and reflection in the areas of identity and corporate intersection demonstrate characteristics and content similar to those being debated internationally, these two themes recognize circumstances unique to this country.

This article comments on selected aspects of each of these themes in an exploratory review that seeks to establish the extent of design engagement with the demands of the evolving economic and social order. The intention is not to provide an in-depth interrogation of impulses informing the selected aspects. Rather, it is to present a broadly based interpretation of the current situation, and to contribute to the debate about the future of graphic design in South Africa by offering some perspectives on the opportunities, directions, and options available to design in this country. I contend that there have been significant developments in graphic design over the last decade, and that progress has been made towards the realization of “a new South African design order.” The real need, however, is for a better balance and integration between the economic and social dimensions of design, aided by the development of a more comprehensive, coherent, and penetrating indigenous design discourse and practice, marked by critical introspection and supported by rigorous research.

The Quest for a Local Idiom

The new South African constitution was enacted on May 8, 1996. This event formally marked the end of official, legislative institutionalization of divisive social and political policies in South Africa, and laid the foundations for a democratic future. The significance of this event must be interpreted within the broader context of South African history. Beginning with the settlement by the Dutch of the Cape in 1652, the history of this country has been shaped by both imperialism and colonialism coupled with the indigenous counter forces of defiance and obstruction. After 1948, the implementation of apartheid policies entrenched a system and brand of internal colonialism that gradually resulted in international isolation, and gave rise to resistance movements that particularized the South African situation. With the release from prison of Nelson Mandela in 1990, and his election as president in 1994, South Africans faced the emergence from international obscurity and intimations of another, more inclusive national and cultural identity.

The capacity of visual domains to clarify cultural identity, forge a national consciousness, and contribute to the expression of a national identity was thrust into prominence. The specific role that graphic design could play in these processes still is being analyzed and debated in different forums. Two tracks are briefly considered below. The first describes the focus that has been placed on the crafting of an indigenous design expression. The second suggests that the critical assessment of graphic design’s contribution to establishing identity does not end with the aesthetic, but must take greater

cognizance of how the new social, political, and cultural order is conceptually fixed and visually registered.

The need to explore and establish a distinctive and unique identity in graphic design has enjoyed considerable attention in published articles, conference papers, and in the work of South African designers during the last decade. The idea of an indigenous design identity essentially has been concerned with the search for, and honing, of a characteristic mode or form of expression and stylistic vocabulary peculiar to this country. Although the idea by no means is novel,³ it was given additional impetus by the optimism and anticipation accompanying the social and economic changes offered by the new political order. Designers were forced to reconsider a number of previously entrenched notions. The observation that South African designers slavishly copy or imitate international design solutions, while ignoring what was happening on their own doorstep, increasingly was raised. The desirability of South African design work being heavily imbued with Western sensibilities and design values was questioned, and a more detailed consideration was given to the nature and qualities of a design approach relevant to its African context.

Various and indiscriminately labeled a South African design language, visual language, style, dialect, or aesthetic, a cursory overview of its articulation and manifestations reveals that the quest for a local idiom essentially has been informed by three challenges. These are first, the symbolic signaling of a new political order at the national and provincial levels, as well as the indication by private enterprises that they wish to be seen as part of the new dispensation. The second is the strategic positioning and competitive differentiation of South African design in the global arena. Finally, the drive to satisfy individual and creative curiosity concerning the nature of a design aesthetic meaningful within the South African experience continues to challenge designers.

The clearest indications and connotations of political change are conveyed by new or revised South African national symbols, regional identities, and redesigned corporate identities for state and private enterprises. Obvious examples that have emerged over the last decade are the official coat of arms, national symbols such as the Olympic logo visual identity systems for state departments including the Department of Arts, Culture, Science, and Technology, and for large multinational organizations such as mining corporations AngloGold and Goldfields. These examples typify the approach adopted locally in forming identities that attempt to come to terms with self-unification, mergers and divestitures, and where design is instrumental both as means to achieve internal coherence and political solidarity, and as a competitive strategy. It is an approach that predominantly seeks to integrate indigenous impulses with a contemporary aesthetic. Such identities thus tend to be marked by an overt incorporation of the natural environment, wildlife, prominent

3 The attempt by a group of white artists commencing in the 1930s under the influence of Afrikaner nationalism is a case in point.

cultural landmarks, and traditional ethnic symbols and craft motifs, as well as naïve techniques and marks considered to be characteristic of Africa.

It is important to note that these examples demonstrate little variance from international design tactics and impulses that have been employed in devising multinational and/or international identities where competitive visibility and cultural legibility are critical design parameters. In an interesting exercise, Lupton⁴ demonstrates how easy it is for multinational and international symbols and logos to degenerate into “weary archetypes,” thus weakening unique recognition and communicative values in a globally competitive environment. Consequently, designers have attempted to reinvest multinational identities with specificity by means of a range of essentially humanistic techniques (e.g., painterly execution, and naturalistic depictions), more informal approaches, and the incorporation of signifying forms from other cultures and localities that are not already in commercial use. To ensure multicultural legibility, cross-cultural identities that simultaneously maintain and transcend cultural traditions increasingly have been developed. According to Steiner and Haas,⁵ these identities “weave and transmute the strands of two contrasting traditions into a statement that is neither and both.” In this process, culturally specific elements of iconography, typography, symbolism, and style are mixed, melded, and transformed by means of quotation, mimicry, and appropriation.

It is this strategy of cultural synthesis or hybridization that essentially underpins the articulation of an indigenous expression in South Africa. The aesthetics of “cultural mixing” perhaps are best exemplified by the local magazine *i-jusi*,⁶ an open and experimental design platform first published in 1995. The magazine allows designers an opportunity to contribute to “an African stew”⁷ by mixing and appropriating existing visual elements and expressions from different sources within the South African cultural matrix. The refinement of the experimental approaches adopted in *i-jusi*, and the crafting of a South African graphic idiom to meet specific communication and business objectives, mark the attitude and design strategies of a growing number of South African designers.

The portfolios of design groups TinTemple and Orange Juice Design⁸ from the mid- to late-1990s serve as two good examples of the above-mentioned attitude and design strategy. The portfolios show that even annual reports, usually regarded as one of the most conventional of corporate documents, demonstrate South African graphic design’s direct engagement with, and visual reconciliation of, history, localities, indigenous cultures, and urban vernacular expressions. For instance, the 1993 Moolla annual report, designed by Orange Juice Design, incorporates (juxtaposes and melds) contemporary and historical images, ethnic patterning, ghosted background images of African artifacts, and an over-varnish that subtly presents African icons. A natural African environment is conveyed by muted

4 E. Lupton, *Mixing Messages. Graphic Design in Contemporary Culture* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), 86-88.

5 H. Steiner and K. Haas, *Cross-cultural Design: Communicating in the Global Marketplace* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1995), vii.

6 Published independently by designer Garth Walker of Orange Juice Design, the magazine is widely distributed throughout the design industry and the design education field. It has garnered international interest, and continues to play a significant role in the South African design arena. Roughly translated, the title is the Zulu word for “juice.”

7 The origin of the term and design concept “African stew” is credited to Kenyan academic and designer Odoch Pido, and its popular use and promotion in South Africa to designer Garth Walker. See M. Sauthoff, “Portfolio of South African Designers: Garth Walker,” *Image & Text* 5 (1995): 8-11.

8 TinTemple was established in 1996 by the young designers Carl Lamprecht, Daniel Matthews, and David Holland, who proclaimed a commitment to tap into the history, culture, and vernacular expressions of Johannesburg. Orange Juice Design was established in Durban by designer Garth Walker in 1995. One of its founding objectives was to take Afrocentric design into world markets.

colors, soft photographic treatment, and paper textures.⁹ The 1997 Khula Enterprise annual report, from the TinTemple studio, contextualizes a standard approach to typography and layout by means of vernacular images and naive street communication. The cover of the 1998 Khula report seamlessly integrates bold colors, ethnic pattern, kudu horns, Africana¹⁰ etchings, and contemporary images, all of which are formally and symbolically deployed as motifs throughout the report.¹¹

The Delapse¹² studio, first established in 1996 and specializing in broadcast and interactive media, adopts a more radical approach to South African graphic identity and cultural hybridization. Their work shifts the focus from overt indigenous motifs and physical places to metaphysical spaces and ambient forces. The contemporary psychological landscape of Johannesburg with its “schizophrenic capacity to sustain both sympathy and an ordered urbane society and a predilection for anarchy and subversion”¹³ forms the backdrop for much of their design. This polarity, according to creative director Johan van Wyk, generates a fertile space for a unique expression, and fosters an inclination for uninhibited transgression and appropriation of form and style without reverence for the specifics of origin. He suggests that urban tensions resulting from turmoil and instability, the idiosyncratic dualities of Johannesburg, and the hedonistic lifestyles indulged in particularly by the city’s young inhabitants inspire a daring and provocative attitude in a new generation of designers. Coupled to aggressive digital experimentation, this attitude acknowledges the complexity of the emerging social and political climate within a specific urban environment.

Three conspicuous attributes of a South African graphic idiom may be extracted from the design portfolios mentioned above. The first is the movement from the blatant appropriation of vernacular images characteristic of earlier South African work. This overt incorporation gradually has paved the way for a closer observation, underplayed references to indigenous color combinations, and Africa’s heritage of shape and pattern; the use of regionalized visual metaphors; and oblique rather than direct allusions. The second attribute is a particular proclivity to remain connected to international design developments and trends. A seamless blending of indigenous elements and iconographies with Western aesthetics and formats has resulted in a Euro-African design amalgam. The third attribute intimates a conceptual commentary that goes beyond a visual aesthetic, and hints at the acknowledgement of a designer’s dual position both within and outside of a culture. A direct engagement with an immediate environment and its vernacular manifestations, subcultures, tactile qualities, ambient forces, and lifestyles is encouraging local designers to draw on the intrinsic capacity of design to offer acute social and political observations. These above-mentioned three attributes contribute to the evolution of sophisticated and complex visual nuances in contemporary South African

9 M. Sauthoff, “Portfolio of South African designers: Garth Walker,” *Image & Text* 5 (1995): 8-11.

10 Africana is the term used for books, pictures, *objects d’art*, and diverse rarities of South African provenance or interest.

11 M. Sauthoff, “Portfolio of South African Designers: TinTemple,” *Image & Text* 8 (1998): 9-14.

12 Based in Johannesburg, Delapse has been the recipient of numerous national and international awards.

13 J. Van Wyk, “Place of Gold,” *Design Indaba Magazine* 5 (2001): 60-63. See also *Bladerunner Aesthetics: Order, Disorder, and the South African Graphic Image* (Unpublished paper presented by Van Wyk at the 2001 Icoagrada Congress in Johannesburg).

design that demand the forging of lateral connections and a high level of visual literacy from audiences. A sustained local rhetoric that evidences a range of possible modes of expression and recognizes a plurality and variety of design voices is emerging, rather than a singular and uniform identity, an idea that seemed initially to guide design thinking and production.

Commentary relating to an indigenous idiom generally is underpinned by celebratory attitudes and assumptions of progressive integration and unification. It largely is driven by two impulses, namely the subjective domain of the designer and the competitive global context. Conference papers and published reviews tend to focus on creative innovation, personal inspiration, and showcasing design outcomes. Indigenous sources are traced, charted, and categorized, often without the benefit of any analytical perspective or much additional information. The urgency of strategically positioning South African design in the global arena is consistently reiterated, thus underscoring design's economic dimension. The importance of a differentiating visual aesthetic and the value of design skills honed in a complex multicultural commercial setting continue to be espoused by prominent members of the design and communications industries.

On the whole, a great deal of discussion appears to be marked by an attraction to surface appearance and attention to formal qualities. Currently, very little explanatory and/or critical analysis has attempted to comprehensively place local developments within frameworks that adopt complex, multifaceted, or contrarian views of identity. For instance, few designers question whether the prevalent dialectic of the international and local might signify that South African design continues to be determined by imported design models and thinking. Topics such as the semiotic and semantic capacity of a forum like *i-jusi*, or recent developments in terms of the unfolding of content themes that touch on controversial political and social issues,¹⁴ have yet to elicit serious consideration. Innovative practices in the magazine have tended to be interpreted as a pragmatic or experimental redirection of formal design production.

Aspects of South African graphic language and its relation to change, more specifically the extent to which fundamental social change actually is supported and/or reflected, have commanded even less attention. For instance, the democratization of the language policy,¹⁵ and how this should be visually articulated, holds stylistic and symbolic implications with regard to the presentation of indigenous language design applications. These appear not to have garnered acknowledgement from the design community.¹⁶ The graphic devices and styles of the liberation movements, their connotations of social transition, and their integration into current political and national symbology as signals indicative of fundamental change have yet to be granted serious recognition and comment. Observations and reviews of the evolution of a distinctive South

14 Themes explored in recent editions have taken a more critical stance, and deal with aspects of crime, urban violence, religious beliefs, pornography, and immigration.

15 South Africa has eleven official languages.

16 Designer Zhukof (Steiner & Haas, *Cross-Cultural Design*: 204-211) provides some relevant insights in this regard in his discussion of designing for the United Nations. Here, the conceptual foundation of the organization as equality of peoples and nations is of paramount influence, and demands the fair and equal visual and stylistic treatment of mediated communications irrespective of alphabet, language, cultural, or geographic audience.

African graphic idiom seldom note that it blatantly evidences many salient characteristics of postmodern design or critically comment on its links with post- and neo-colonial impulses. Discussions of identity in graphic design remain fairly unproblematized, one-sided, and unconnected to wider discourses.

Broader Visions of Identity

A growing number of prominent scholars and intellectuals agree that identity is one of the major socio-political issues of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. This implies that professional and academic disciplines increasingly must possess and provide an adequate insight into, and an understanding of, individual, group, national, and global identities. If graphic design is to make a meaningful contribution to ideas of identity in this country, a more penetrating, extensive, and considered examination of the multidimensional nature of identity, and how ideas of identity are registered and interpreted in visual imagery, is demanded. Designers must, of necessity, develop a critical framework that allows them not only to address the designed object, but also the sites and circumstances of its production and use.

An inherent duality in the production and interpretation of contemporary graphic design is neatly encapsulated by Jobling and Crowley.¹⁷ They contend that contemporary design is essentially marked by a visual language of appropriation, parody, pastiche, and the contextual revalorization of graphic forms coupled to greater subjectivity and individuality in the use of accepted design conventions. All of this clearly signals a change in societal values. Jobling and Crowley suggest, however, a divide in interpretations of the nature and identity of the society represented. For some commentators, contemporary design mirrors a new attitude that encourages a “knowing” and exploring spectatorship, a celebration of diversity, and a progressive recognition of pluralism. In essence, this is a recognition of different and individual racial, social, and gender identities and nonconformities, and an acceptance of the presence of proactive viewers who are willing and able to extract and construct their own meanings for their own purposes. Alternatively, design is perceived to represent a wholehearted capitulation to the forces of consumerism that deaden differences by converting them into commodities. This propensity, the reliance on intertextuality and the recycling of ideas, images, and symbolism have led to definitions of “a kind of promiscuous and apolitical culture,” one in which there is no position “from which to speak that is in advance, or even outside the general position.”¹⁸ Sadar¹⁹ adopts a more radical stance that equates current consumer culture with the blatant exploitation of non-Western cultures and the continuation of Eurocentric colonial suppression.

The above formulations pinpoint some of the dilemmas contained in post- and neo-colonial situations such as South Africa

17 P. Jobling and D. Crowley, *Graphic Design: Reproduction and Representation Since 1800* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996) 271-288.

18 *Ibid.*, 298 and 297.

19 Z. Sadar, “Do Not Adjust Your Mind. Postmodernism, Reality, and the Other,” *Futures* 25:8 (1993): 877-893.

that have to contend with mainstream cultural globalization and consumerism, the development of decolonized cultural sensibilities, and the recognition of internally colonized groups. Issues that have been stressed in many post-colonial contexts have, as yet, to receive serious consideration by South African graphic design. These include the ethics and politics of cultural appropriation, representations of previously marginalized groups, the recuperation of indigenous histories, tracking the work of unrecognized and/or exiled professionals, and acknowledging the inherent tensions in the conceptual positioning of South African design relative to African and first-world contexts.

South African graphic design freely and generously uses and draws from its rich cultural and ethnic mix. The indiscriminate appropriation of imagery often results in cultural forms, indigenous creative expressions, and visual traditions being symbolically devalued, commodified, and invested with alien meanings. Many traditional items and visual elements are legally unprotected and available for incorporation into the work of professional designers. Cultural groups, particularly developing rural communities and those with little economic or political leverage, generally have no control over the trivialization of indigenous forms or the revalorization of historically charged symbols for mainstream consumption. The ethics and politics of cultural appropriation are given perfunctory mention in South African graphic design circles. Questions of who holds the right to cultural material, its appropriation and dissemination, and which evaluative frameworks legitimately apply seldom are broached.

The recuperation of African writing systems, and symbolic graphics of African origin and how they may contribute to design, have not received the type of consideration comparable, for instance, to studies such as those of Mafundikwa,²⁰ a Zimbabwean designer. Personal design experiences and interpretations of the problems of integration, domination, transformation, and indigenous expression posed by the Western/African dichotomies have yet to be granted the type of exposure in South Africa comparable to those documented and articulated by, for example, black Kenyan designer Pido.²¹ Nor has South African graphic design attempted to understand its conceptual positioning relative to the West through in-depth explorations and considerations that invoke a center-periphery model in reviews of design, similar to those, for instance, of Asia²² and the Latino community of the United States.²³

Rather, it has been cultural theorists, and art historians in particular, who have considered South African material culture in terms of post- and neo-colonial studies, and identified the duality and dilemmas of continuity and change implicit within the broad domain of design. These interpretations sometimes have considered aspects of graphic design, but they have, to a larger degree, relied on semiotic readings of contemporary culture and mediated commu-

20 S. Mafundikwa, *Afrikan Alphabets* (Unpublished paper presented at the 2001 Icoagrada Congress in Johannesburg). See also E. Gunn, "Ziva" *Upper & Lower Case. The International Journal of Graphic Design and Digital Media* 25:3 (1998): 7-11, 41.

21 J. P. O. Pido, "Made in Africa. A Designer's View of East Africa," *Design Review* 15:4 (1995): 30-35.

22 R. Ghose, "Design, Development, Culture, and Cultural Legacies in Asia" in *The Idea of Design. A Design Issues Reader*, V. Margolin and R. Buchanan, eds. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994).

23 R. A. Greeley, "Richard Duardo's *Aztlan* Poster: Interrogating Cultural Hegemony in Graphic Design," *Design Issues* 14:1 (1998): 21-34.

- 24 Interpretations that typically highlight these issues are B. Buntman, "Selling with the San: Representations of Bushmen People and Artefacts," *Image & Text* 4 (1994): 12-16; T. Du Plooy, "Madam and Eve: A Change Agent in the New South Africa," *Image & Text* 9 (1994): 19-26. M. Erasmus, "Lion, Camel, Man" *Image & Text* 6 (1996): 25-31; J. Van Eeden, "Mickey's African Adventure" *Image & Text* 5 (1995): 3-7; J. Van Eeden, "Malling, a Postmodern Landscape," *Image & Text* 8 (1998): 38-42; R. Van Niekerk, "Humour at the Horingboom Oasis," *Image & Text* 8 (1998): 4-8; and C. Wolfaart, "Of Mice and (Wo)men: Disneyland and the Cultural Aesthetics of Entertainment in the New South Africa," *Image & Text* 7 (1997): 10-14.
- 25 Kieser (*AdFocus, Supplement to the Financial Mail*, 1999:162) suggests that corporate image and identity design in South Africa has followed three movements over the last two decades: disinvestment, privatization, and globalization.
- 26 See K. Schilperoort, J. Sampson, and L. Selsnick on design and branding in the *Encyclopaedia of Brands and Branding in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Affinity Advertising and Publishing, 1998). See also the unpublished paper "The Use of Kinetic Design to Leverage a Brand Identity," presented by K. Schilperoort at the seminar *Design and Technology: Britain and South Africa, Partners in Opportunity*. Also the unpublished paper, "Design as a Strategic Asset: Exploring the Link Between Design and Economic Success" presented by J. Lange at the same seminar. See also J. Lange, "A Front Runner in Employer Branding in *The Encyclopaedia of Brands and Branding in South Africa*. (1999).
- 27 Restructuring, multicultural, and multiethnic employee compositions have accentuated the importance of corporate culture as a management asset: "... that stands on a par with labour, material, capital, and information." (A. Micklethwait and A. Wooldridge, *The Witch Doctors: What the Management Gurus Are Saying, Why It Matters and How to Make Sense of It* (London: Mandarin, 1997), 262.

nications. Typical sites for analysis include advertising, cartoons and comic books, and shopping and entertainment environments. Although graphic design has remained an incidental consideration rather than a focus of attention, its implication in a number of themes periodically come under review. These reviews offer critiques of the visual representations of stereotypical gender, racial, and national identities, and provide revelations of the continuation of specific historical and colonial visions of Africa, the extension of cultural imperialism, and the entrenching of capitalist hegemony. Alternative interpretations of media images highlight the potential of design to contribute to nation building by upholding and promoting the ideals of democracy, to provide dissident voices within the new dispensation, and to integrate once-separated cultural identities through the creation of better multicultural communications.²⁴

On the other hand, the growing significance of visual identity in the marketing mix has encouraged prominent South African designers and consultancies to initiate a dialogue in the professional domain that seeks to demonstrate how concepts of identity can contribute to both long-term strategic and immediate business and marketing objectives. Closer scrutiny of visual identity and image management by local designers has resulted from corporate restructuring and (re)positioning,²⁵ but also because of a greater recognition of the importance of branding (group, service, product and region/country/nation) in competitive differentiation. Not only have new design services and applications been devised by local consultancies, but designers also increasingly and actively explicate design/visual dimensions, processes, and conceptual approaches to visual branding. Aspects such as the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of brand value have been related to color, typographic configurations, visual impact, stylistic devices, and visual continuity.²⁶ In a similar vein, the expanding presence of digital technology has stimulated designers to indicate the specific importance of visual identity in interactive advertising and e-commerce and its contribution to facilitating accessibility, developing a cohesive voice for the brand, and supporting the strategic integration of media.

The manifested presence of visual identity in the South African public environment indicates an acceptance of its value. Less clearly articulated or promoted in the professional arena is how successful designers have been in facilitating the integration of visual identity programs and precepts into the systems and culture of client organizations in terms of both operational/functional and reception/acceptance dimensions, and as a means to promote internal cohesion and corporate values.²⁷ Nor is it apparent to what extent design has assumed responsibility for clarifying and fostering an understanding of the pervasive quality of visual identity and the extended articulation of the core values it should embody in all organizational applications. For instance, the importance of symbolic coherence and the need for credible and consistent visual

argumentation/reasoning goes beyond the provision/application of visual standards, to visual interpretation, sustained visual rhetoric, and an ongoing manifested visual articulation of values. The question that arises is how well has design been considered as a means to support management imperatives in the internal environments of South African organizations, from both theoretical and practical perspectives?

Organizational Imperatives

In a consolidation and review of Western management theory, Micklethwait and Wooldridge²⁸ suggest that the three themes that have dominated contemporary management thinking are the changing structure of organizations, globalization, and the nature of work. These have generated four streams of debate. The first stream relates to assumptions of the size, strength and structure of organizations. The second and third are the use and management of knowledge and information; and corporate leadership, strategies, and accountability. The final stream deals with the impact of change on the world of work and workers, namely where do people work, whom do they work for, and what do they do. These observations are echoed in a more specific and South African context by the management view of strategic issues, polled consecutively from 1996 to 1999 (albeit with varying priorities). Identified issues are growth opportunities, global competitiveness, improving skills, human resource issues, vision, social stability, transformation, state legislation, information technology, affirmative action, and product development.²⁹

Local scenario planners³⁰ concur, suggesting in a more compact manner that the values shaping the South African business environment are information and information technology; global cultures, but national identities; pluralism; ethics, accountability, and transparency; and social responsibility. They also suggest³¹ that sustainable development in this country lies in the interrelationship of economic growth, environmental issues, and the quality of human life. The recent *King Report on Corporate Governance*³² strongly reinforces this sentiment by stressing that the achievement of balanced economic, social, and environmental performance (the triple bottom line) is fundamental to contemporary enterprises. Corporate organizations thus are directly implicated in issues that traditionally were considered to be outside their accepted domains and boundaries. For instance, basic information, education, and promoting lifestyle changes related to identified areas and topics (health, literacy, energy, and water) to all sectors of the organization and society have been placed within the ambit of corporate concerns.

Designers are obliged to consider how graphic design might be assigned to support strategic and operational business objectives, to confront social issues in an organization's macro and micro environments, and to identify conceptual frameworks that could guide desirable roles for design. A concept that presents possible sites for

28 Ibid.

29 *Sunday Times/Business Times*, "Strategic Issues for the Next Four Years" (April 18, 1999).

30 C. Sunter, *The High Road: Where Are We Now?* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau Tafelberg, 1996).

31 B. Huntley, R. Siegfried and C. Sunter, *South African Environments into the 21st Century* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau Tafelberg, 1989).

32 Released in 2002, this is the second report on corporate governance compiled under the chairmanship of advocate Mervyn King.

appropriate graphic design contributions is a humanistic management paradigm.³³ This paradigm suggests that an organization is continually challenged to consider, in a holistic sense, how it represents itself and how it is required to make itself transparent in ways that assist both empirical and cognitive orientation and interaction within the organization. It must seek ways to support individual development, facilitate the operational tasks of employees, and acknowledge “other” value systems.

The diversity of operational tasks individuals are required to perform within South African organizations has been amplified by decentralization and the devolution of functions and responsibilities/accountability, owing essentially to two main factors: digital technology and business process reengineering. Both cut across all functions and departments, generating a multiplicity of communications options. These tendencies have contributed to the volume of information in internal circulation and served to democratize design functions. Everyone potentially is a designer, brand manager, strategist, and media communicator, and by implication should be able to understand and apply visual and design principles in the effective and efficient transmission of ideas and information.³⁴ This must include the ability to not only assist the flow and cognitive accessibility of information in the internal environment, but also to ensure the maintenance of visual continuity and a cohesive voice for the organization. Design-specific understanding such as, for instance, appropriate visual strategies and audience specific graphic techniques, as well as participative and collaborative design processes, thus are essential requirements for effective internal communication. Designers are called on to cultivate this insight through an informative interfacing with all levels of a client organization.

Although the value of an informative interface has been emphasized by South African designers, there is little documented evidence to indicate whether, or to what extent, appropriate initiatives have been adopted or implemented. Personal observation suggests that promotional material such as corporate profiles, newsletters distributed to clients, and interpersonal contact between design companies and clients sometimes fulfill an educational function. Individual designers have indicated a commitment to an educative role for themselves in a number of areas. Once again, there is little documentation describing the content, methods, or success of such efforts. Oosthuizen³⁵ intimates that it is not common practice in South Africa to inform and align all levels of the organization behind communication strategies. In considering the overall approach used by South African designers in the provision of design services and design recommendations, Temple³⁶ suggests that designers are unable to explain their conceptual methodologies or articulate their role as communicators. Other commentators propose that a perceived inability to present design rationales does not engender confidence in client organizations and that this often inhibits design acceptance

33 G. Puth, *The Communicating Manager* (Pretoria: J. L. van Schaik, 1994) presents historical trajectories in the development of a humanistic management paradigm, describes its salient characteristics, and details implications and principles for management communications.

34 Lam-Po-Tang illustrates how extensively the electronic media and electronic commerce channels intersect with internal departments and functions in an organization, compared to more traditional design media. (A. Lam-Po-Tang, “Managing a Design Association” (Unpublished paper from the conference *Viewpoints in Time: Sydney Design 99*).

35 T. Oosthuizen, “Communications: A Commodity Business?” *Image & Text* 6 (1996): 14-17.

36 M. A. Temple, *Visual Aspects in Integrated Marketing Communications* (Unpublished MBA dissertation. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand, 1997).

and use. Furthermore, design credibility is questioned because of a poor research basis and a lack of relevant data. This deficit is regarded as being particularly problematic, since it has resulted in the superficial understanding of social and development issues pertinent to South Africa.³⁷

According to the World Bank, more than fifty percent of South Africa's population (about twenty-two million) live in "third world" conditions, and about thirteen percent can be categorized as first-world in terms of education and income.³⁸ Social inequality, multi-ethnic employee profiles, and diverse levels of employee literacy are key challenges facing organizations. An essential aspect of equity in a working environment must be creating access to an information culture for segments of an organization that are routinely excluded from it. Graphic design inherently offers the means to decipher intricate information, simplify processes, and construct frameworks that lead to understanding in a manner compatible with individual circumstances of use. Again, there is little documented information to indicate whether, or to what extent, South African graphic design attempts to make the working environment "visible" to all of an organization's employees.

Anceschi³⁹ suggests that the concept of "visibility" defines the essence of both what the designer does and the discipline of graphic design itself. He suggests that we "...live in an optical and visual world, but certainly not a visible one."⁴⁰ Thus, while the general tendency is to emphasize the importance of the visual in daily life and future scenarios, an oppositional view throws "a civilization of blindness" into relief. This situation may be characterized by an excess of visual stimulation; a lack of symbolic order; and concealed information. Concealed information within an organization may be by intent, for instance, a competitive culture of secrecy, or by inadvertently blocking access to information. Poor or inappropriate cognitive ordering of information; obtrusive and obstructive organizational frameworks; and the factual complexity produced by an organization's activities and structures frequently limit accessibility. Anceschi proposes that, in a world of declining visibility, the designer's role is not one of art and visual problem-solving only. Design competencies must include that of critical consultant able to reveal broader and complex problems, and to take up the position of users in negotiations with managements.

These matters relate not only to way-finding systems or how policies, procedures, and processes are rendered more transparent in the daily life of employees, but also to how specific issues are dealt with. For instance, transformation is a critical and multidimensional concept in South African organizations. Graphic design is intimately connected to ideas of transformation in its thinking, articulation, and final form. Lange⁴¹ identifies some ways in which design may assist organizational transformation in South Africa. These deserve greater exploration and clarification. Another critical issue in South African

37 These issues have received ongoing commentary. See R. Harber, "Making Ideas Affordable and Comprehensible," *Design Education for Developing Countries* (Pretoria: Design Institute, 1993); A. Kalsi, "Mass Production for Production by the Masses" in *Design Education for Small Business Development* (Pretoria: Design Institute, 1995); J. Lange, "Strategic Design in a Transforming Communications Ecology" *Image & Text* 8 (1996): 33-37. M. Southwell, "Magic by Design: Technology Transformed," *Image & Text* 7 (1997): 3-9; J. Van Eeden, unpublished summary of proceedings from the seminar *Postgraduate Studies in Design* held at the University of Pretoria, 1994; and K. Van Niekerk, "A Conspiracy of Mediocrity," *Image & Text* 2 (1993): 33-36.

38 G. Addison, *The Hidden Edge: South Africa's Quest for Innovation* (Johannesburg: Engineering Association, 2000).

39 G. Anceschi, "Visibility in Progress," *Design Issues* 12:3 (1996): 3-13.

40 *Ibid.*, 5.

41 J. Lange, "Strategic Design in a Transforming Communications Ecology," *Image & Text* 6 (1996): 8-13.

organizations is the need for an increasing sensitivity to the incorporation of indigenous value systems into management thinking. An example is the current debate concerning the practical application and implications of Western management techniques drawing on the deep-rooted *Ubuntu* principles of African culture.⁴² The *Ubuntu* tradition is based on ideas of participation, dialogue, cooperation, and the human spirit. Although not yet widely accepted as a viable option for dealing with complex dilemmas in the field of business, design commentary has made perfunctory mention of the argumentation surrounding this topic,⁴³ but has not pursued design implications in any great depth.

The conditions enunciated above advocate a more inclusive, knowledge-based form of design professionalism aimed at combating the interpretation of clients' needs in terms of one's own disciplinary strengths. Designers need to move away from the focus on very narrow portions of organizations, and to develop a comprehensive understanding of the workplace and how it is changing. This requires a practical consideration of discipline and role convergence, and the definition of strategies that acknowledge both strong design specialist expertise and design generalists who have the intellectual range to relate that expertise to a broad range of activity.

Realignment and New Connections

Ideas of a more inclusive form of practice suggest that design consultancies must see their interaction with corporate organizations in terms of understanding, co-operation, and negotiation regarding graphic design as a complex and diverse practice. Designers need to interact with client organizations across a broad spectrum. This may range from a championing interface that advocates, promotes, clarifies, and informs; through all the mediation and explanation demanded by design projects; to a counseling interface that cultivates a climate of acceptance and understanding of design, its use and application in both general and specific ways. The best alignment of design to the characteristics and requirements of the organization are of primary consideration. This could include, for instance, the transfer of inherent designing skills such as design analysis and interpretation, visual presentation, graphic facilitation, strategic visioning and the promotion of a better appreciation of the socio-cultural dimensions of design and how these can be of value within organizations. A holistic vision of design is presupposed, echoing the growing emphasis in the literature of design on aspects including total design environments, strategically integrated systems, scenario planning, and fourth-order design.⁴⁴

The traditional perception of graphic design in this country has tended to favor the compartmentalization of design into inwardly focused segments that offer defined design services based on core competencies. Most corporate organizations in South Africa commission graphic design projects on an *ad hoc* basis. This selec-

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- 42 E. D. Prinsloo "Ubuntu Culture and Participatory Management" in *Philosophy from Africa: A Text with Readings*, P. H. Coetzee and A. P. J. Roux, eds. (Johannesburg: International Thomson Publishing, 1998).
- 43 R. Van Zyl and M. D. Sauthoff, "Buchanan's Matrix: A Framework for Strategic Alignment (unpublished paper presented at the 2001 Design Education Forum conference held in Johannesburg).
- 44 L. Keeley, "The Strategic Palette," *Communication Arts* 34:2 (1992): 134-139; L. Keeley, "Transform: Reinventing Industries Through Strategic Design Planning" in *The New Business of Design: Papers from the International Design Conference in Aspen* (New York: Allworth Press, 1996); C.T. Mitchell, *New Thinking in Design: Conversations on Theory and Practice* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1996). A. A. Moles, "The Legibility of the World: A Project for Graphic Design" in *Design Discourse: History, Theory, Criticism*, V. Margolin, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); R. Buchanan, "Branzi's Dilemma: Design in Contemporary Culture," *Design Issues* 14:1 (1998): 3-20. And T. Golsby-Smith, "Fourth Order Design: A Practical Perspective" *Design Issues* 12:1 (1996): 5-25.

tive, project-based use, rather than a culture or understanding of design as an organizational resource, leads to a fragmented rather than an integrated, holistic or synergistic use of design. An impetus to broaden the scope of design services offered by South African practitioners may be inferred from the current debate and initiatives in the practicing arena regarding alternative modes of practice. For instance, multidisciplinary professional configurations, cooperatives and alliances, and strategic and integrated approaches that in- or outsource design expertise in accordance with dictates appropriate to devising an optimal solution to clients' projects, are variously being implemented.⁴⁵

A more inclusive vision of design also is being presented on platforms that expose the multidisciplinary scope of design to business audiences. This has been the aim of a number of conferences during the last few years.⁴⁶ Various design associations and industry publications have launched both promotional and explanatory initiatives in attempts to broaden understanding of design.⁴⁷ The general thrust of these ventures is to entrench the professional status of design, clarify the nature and procedures of interactions with clients, promote ideas of accountability as integral aspects of design practice, and orient clients towards changes in media, services and design techniques. Efforts primarily are targeted at the realization of business objectives rather than indications of social and cultural involvement or the systematic integration of design into client organizations.

Other tracks that attempt to define a more encompassing and inclusive vision of design are being activated, but outside the direct intersection with corporate organizations. A good example is the recent *Interdesign 99* Water initiative⁴⁸ that demonstrates the viability of cooperative, multidisciplinary design exploration in the search for solutions to critical social problems. It typifies design experimentation in thinktank and scenario situations that foster a broad vision, innovation, connectivity, and inter- and cross-disciplinary participation centered around identified themes and alternative solutions to specified problems. This is an option that increasingly should be considered as a means to understand and deal with the complexity and scale inherent in the contemporary South African environment.

Another endeavor to cultivate a broader vision of design that deserves mention is the promotion of postgraduate studies, theory, and research in design education. Over the last decade, three trajectories may be discerned in bids to confront research and theory in local design education. The first examines the nature of design research in a broad sense: for instance, the scientific/academic acceptance and status of design, the difference between design methodology and research methodology, and the distinction and categorization of types of research in design.⁴⁹ The second considers the relevance of works of practice as legitimate equivalencies to research outputs. The

45 *AdFocus*. Supplement to the *Financial Mail* (May 21, 1999).

46 Typical examples are *Design: 2000 and Beyond* held in Pretoria in 1997, and *Design and Technology: Britain and South Africa Partners in Opportunity* held in Johannesburg in 1998.

47 Design South Africa (DSA), a professional design association, has launched numerous initiatives targeted variously at government, education, professional practitioners, and the buyers of design services.

48 *Fresh, Bulletin of Design South Africa* Interdesign '99 Africa 2 (1999): 1, 4.

49 See J. Butler-Adam, "The Dilemma of the Educator of Creative Disciplines and Formal Research" in *The Need for Research Development in Design* (Pretoria: Design Institute, 1992). Also see M. Sauthoff and J. Lange, "Developing a Culture of Research" (Information Design at the University of Pretoria) in *The Need for Research Development in Design* (Pretoria: Design Institute, 1992).

mode of theoretical support that should accompany design outputs and dealing with entrenched academic conventions are ongoing questions.⁵⁰ The third trajectory deals with nurturing a culture of design research in terms of standards, content, and the dissemination of results.⁵¹

These developments have introduced a measure of critical reflection and debate into design, but they also have served to highlight a number of difficulties. There is an extreme lack of insight and expertise (in graphic design and other design disciplines) in relation to theoretical and methodological aspects that enable coherent and sustained research. Few verified empirical data on the nature and structure of the graphic design industry and local circumstances are available. As a mode of practice, graphic design has not been subjected to much objective description or critical attention. Even a popular graphic design critique, which would encourage general understanding and informed assessment of design, is almost nonexistent. While a degree of analytical scrutiny is routinely given to art or films in the popular media, graphic design is seldom submitted to critical review. Very little concentration has been expended on exploring the indigenous dimensions of graphic design and establishing a local discourse. For instance, the literature on South African architecture that reflects, and reflects upon, the rich diversity of style, influences, and imperatives that have emerged in three centuries of interaction between indigenous factors and broader international impulses, cannot be remotely matched by considerations of graphic design in South Africa.

Conclusion and Final Remarks

Graphic design in the post-apartheid era has developed into a sophisticated practice and industry that projects itself as capable of delivering international standards of design and servicing large corporate clients. A unique graphic idiom that acknowledges local circumstances gradually is emerging. Professional design activities and status are being systematically promoted and entrenched, and there currently appears to be a growing recognition and exploration of graphic design as a resource and tool in certain well-defined marketing areas. While acknowledging these positive directions, this article suggests that graphic design neglects to stimulate an understanding of its wider socio-cultural role or to adequately address issues related to the totality of its national environment and culture. The current confluence, dichotomies and interaction of first/ third world and Africa/ West have been neither satisfactorily confronted nor properly conceptualized by South African graphic design.

Considerations of identity seem to indicate that design practice and commentary continue to align themselves with and aspire to the predominant Western and entrepreneurial design paradigm, with its emphasis on competitive differentiation and consumption. Concomitantly creative production and deliberations tend to focus

50 This is a longstanding debate. Critical points are encapsulated by J. Fourie in the unpublished paper "The Challenge Pertaining to an Accountable System for the Recognition of Visual and Performing Arts Research in South Africa." This paper was read at the *Workshop on Arts Research Subsidy Funding for Artefacts and Other Research Outputs at Technikons and Universities* held in Pretoria, 1999.

51 In this regard, *Image & Text*, the only academic design journal in South Africa, has consistently attempted to foster a critical attitude toward design and to develop local design writing and readership. The journal was first published by the University of Pretoria in 1992.

on the values of visual impact, novelty, entertainment, assertiveness in image creation, fluidity, and the continuous revalorization of graphic forms. Very little thought has been expended on locating graphic design within the broader parameters and problematics of visual integration, domination, transformation, and indigenous expression. Insufficient attention has been directed to establishing a local discourse that allows for a deeper engagement with social context, or interrogates cultural meaning or monitors mainstream applications in relation to popular reception. Fundamental and penetrating considerations of the articulation of a South African graphic language as a search for values, understanding, and identity within the broader contexts of change in South Africa only now are beginning to emerge.

In looking at graphic design's intersection with corporate organizations, this article speculatively supports a perception that design appears to focus primarily on external constituencies, and does not devote suitable thoughtfulness to internal constituencies and the integration of design into the functional and cultural environments of client organizations. The broad thrust of interaction with client organizations seems to be on the expansionistic role of design and on clarifying its professional status. This article hints at a reconciliation (albeit simplistically) of design as a humanistic endeavor situated within the particular circumstances of an organization, and as a response to the impact of both information technology and contemporary management processes. This attitude recognizes the value of collaborative initiatives and the integration of many kinds of knowledge. It honors progressive transformation, the acknowledgement of traditional differences, explanation and mutual understanding, and the rational analysis of economic, social, cultural, and individual needs. The article supports a view of an extended and more encompassing role for graphic design that presupposes the adoption of a holistic understanding of design, and reinforces the importance of designers having a sound theoretical basis from which to practice. This includes the ability to elucidate conceptual methodologies, provide an informed appraisal of design, and place the optimal utilization of design within an increasingly complex environment.

If South African graphic design truly wishes to make a significant contribution to the achievement of sustainable economic and social development in this country, a number of points become evident. South African designers must move from a position that privileges creative intuition, the subjective domain, self-development, and tacit knowledge to the adoption of a multifaceted confrontation and wider engagement with historical and contemporary circumstances relating to design in this country. This movement must take design beyond "showing" and persuasion to fundamental explanations that comprehensively expose the semantics of design, and clarify its contributions to contexts of culture and use. A nascent

design discourse is introducing a measure of objective description, critical assessment, and reflection, although this currently is fragmented, uneven, and eclectic. There is an urgent need to establish a systematic basis and accumulate a body of knowledge that will aid the integration of relevant aspects of the discourse into the practicing arena. Clearly, the above points indicate a model that suggests that it is essential for graphic design education and practice in South Africa to adopt multiple and defensible viewpoints, follow their implications in the broadest possible way, and permit these considerations to influence design development in this country.

Paradigm Shift: The Challenge to Graphic Design Education and Professional Practice in Post-Apartheid South Africa

Ian Sutherland

“...within our borders the material and symbolic conditions for open exchange between black and white are effectively absent. We still know little about each other beyond the narrow roles history has cast for us.”¹

Although this statement was written more than a decade ago by South African art historian Colin Richards, it might be said that, in spite of many changes, South Africans still are struggling with the “narrow roles that history has cast for [them].” Consequently, this paper seeks to explore some of the issues that have informed the way in which South African visual communications design and designers have attempted to meet the challenges of a country in transformation.

Since Nelson Mandela’s “long walk to freedom” in 1990, much has been said about the failure of apartheid. It would be foolish, to underestimate the impact of this divisive policy on the lives and experiences of all who live in the country. On a physical level, apartheid created (designed) cities that were racially divided under the Group Areas Act, and on an intellectual level, separate education systems for the different races were introduced that created very “narrow roles” for the majority of learners. Culture was used as a tool to divide, hence, on a material and a symbolic level, multiple realities meant that individual South Africans experienced the country and its culture in profoundly different ways. For any paper that hopes to address design education and professional design practice issues in South Africa, this is especially important because it provides the context in which these activities take place. This is particularly true of marketing and advertising which, of necessity, have to deal with reality issues, either as a mirror or as an aspiration model.

Many of the above-mentioned issues have come to the fore since the end of 2001, when the South African Government’s “Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Communication” convened hearings in Cape Town to explore the need for transformation in the marketing and advertising industry. Subsequently, the Government Communications and Information Service (GCIS) has been tasked to

1 C. Richards, “About Face” in *Third Text—3rd World Perspectives on Contemporary Arts and Culture* Autumn/Winter, (1991, London): 104.

explore some of the issues raised at the hearings in order to report back to Parliament before the end of 2002. This investigation has been wide-ranging and includes issues such as advertising content, government or self-regulation of the industry, media and advertising agency ownership, nondiscriminatory research methodologies, employment practice, and education and training issues. Underlying all of this is the importance of marketing in any economy, and a specific recognition of the role that advertising and advertising design play in framing and changing attitudes. In this sense, the GCIS investigation provides a firm indication that the South African government has recognized the importance of design-related issues in national life.

An earlier indicator of government recognition of the importance of design occurred during February 2000 when various stakeholders in design education (Design Education Forum of Southern Africa), the profession (Design South Africa), and the Design Institute met with the government in Cape Town to develop a common understanding of how important design is in developing countries such as South Africa. This initial "South Africa by Design" meeting was followed by a commitment from the Department of Art, Culture, Science, and Technology (DACST) to support a three year design awareness campaign.

As South African society has moved towards normalization since the first democratic elections in 1994, it has almost become a cliché to refer to what has been popularly called the South African "miracle." This is the miracle that ensured that South Africa pulled itself back from the brink of tearing itself apart. As one witnesses the depressingly predictable consequences of the decline in the situation in Palestine and Israel, or in Zimbabwe, one is reminded of the fact that the momentous shifts experienced in South Africa should not be taken for granted.

If one accepts Kuhn's definition of a paradigm as being a "set of beliefs, theories, or a world view that is unquestionably accepted,"² then what we have experienced in South Africa with the dismantling of apartheid deserves serious consideration. It represents a paradigm shift in which a separatist and isolationist view has been overthrown in favor of a policy that espouses an integrated and expansive worldview. The fact that this attempt to change occurs at a time of an international shift towards globalization is significant for both South Africa and the African continent. For some, the shift provides an opportunity to develop a new worldview in which Africa is central. Hence the reference to this millennium as the "African Millennium" at the launch of the African Union in Durban earlier during 2002. Significantly, South Africa's second democratic president, Tabo Mbeki, was the first president of AU. It is he who has conceptualized the notion of an African Renaissance as a prerequisite for the rebirth of the continent.

2 T. S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2nd ed. (1970), 43.

A historical study of the European Renaissance shows that no one person or specific event caused the Renaissance. Rather it was a continuing process. The fact that important technological changes also contributed to change should not be overlooked. In these terms, it is not only South Africa that experienced a paradigm shift during the closing decade of the twentieth century. The practice of graphic design also has been radically transformed, if not redefined, by technological developments. Without denying the heroic contributions of individuals and the importance of specific events in South Africa's recent history, it is important for us to consider the nature of the change if one is to be able understand the past and chart a course into the twenty-first century.

As a professional practice, graphic design in South Africa was shaped by its colonial history. The advent of modern advertising and graphic design was an integral part of the development of the printed media during the nineteenth century. As the colonial power, Britain exported goods that were to be sold to the troops and in the settler market, and it was common practice to have advertisements and design work prepared in Britain for publication. Hence, in the case of the advertisement "How Lord Roberts Wrote BOVRIL" both the British imperial vision and the brand were promoted and imprinted upon the South African landscape. Given the importance of the London-based studios, the status of the local "commercial artist" was not particularly high during the first half of the century. As an article entitled "Our Long-Haired Friends" published in the *South African Advertising* journal explains, "Artists as a class seldom give the income tax authorities much overtime or many sleepless nights."³

It could be argued that the political and cultural dominance of Britain was paramount until after the Second World War, when the influence of the United States became a powerful economic and cultural force in South Africa. Given the importance of Madison Avenue in advertising and modern marketing techniques, perhaps this was inevitable. Within the colonial paradigm, musicians, artists, and designers were forced to look "overseas" for inspiration, and also sought affirmation and recognition in terms of European or American models. Thus originality in the arts and design in South Africa was circumscribed. Consequently, within this colonial paradigm, indigenous art and culture was denigrated if not ignored.

The Nationalist Party that assumed power in 1948 soon thereafter introduced the policy of apartheid that, as mentioned earlier, used culture as a divisive tool and selectively discouraged creativity and originality. Consequently, art education was (and continues to be) considered a "luxury" not to be made available to the majority. On a broader scale, all communications came to be strictly controlled to the point that the government even refused to introduce television until 1976. For graphic designers, this meant that print remained the dominant media during the 1950s and 1960s. Inevitably, the growth

3 H. Henderson, "Our Long-Haired Friends," published in *South African Advertising* (October 1931, Cape Town): 7.

in the local market, and the demands of the print industry, led to the need for more locally trained artists, and this encouraged the introduction of “commercial art” courses in Art and Crafts schools during the 1950s. Furthermore the term “graphic design” was only used when the National Diploma in Graphic Design was offered in colleges for advanced technical education in 1966.

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, the practice of “importing” designers from “overseas” slowed as graduates from local colleges began to assert themselves. Similarly, political events such as the Soweto uprisings in 1976 led to the international isolation of the country. Many international agencies divested themselves of a direct interest in South Africa, and immigration from Europe declined rapidly. Ironically, although it could be argued that the education of local designers remained essentially Eurocentric, during this period it was almost inevitable that, as the commercial and political environment changed, a different sense of identity emerged. In a segregated South Africa, even this identity was molded by colonial history and the interests of the politically and economically dominant group. Hence the U.S. motor company Chrysler promoted its vehicles by asking what the South Africa market loved, to be answered by the jingle, “We love Braaivleis, Rugby, Sunny Skies, and Chevrolet!”

Since the 1930s the advertising trade press has encouraged the advertiser to realize the potential of the “black” consumer, hence the trade advertisement—“4 out of every 5 are non-Europeans.” Under apartheid, this potential was never fully realized because of the restricted earning capacity of the majority. Consequently, only the two official languages were used in South African advertising, namely, Afrikaans and English. Even here there was a cultural dominance in that often the Afrikaans version was merely a direct translation of the English advertisement, and thus lost impact due to its nonidiomatic quality. In the meantime, the potential of what was then referred to as “the black market” was eroded until the rise in black consumer power grew too important to ignore by the late 1970s. So the market (audience) in South Africa before 1990 was viewed by advertisers as primarily a white one. As Green and Lascaris put it:

You marketed to whites because they had the money, and you tacked blacks on at the end of your marketing plan (if you bothered at all) because they were secondary to your company’s main marketing thrust. They just did not have the spending power to push their way forward up the agenda ... By the end of the 60s, that was shortsighted. By the end of the 70s, it was short on logic too.⁴

However, Green and Lascaris add that it was not until “the 1980s [that] the wage gap [between black and white] began to close and the trade union and the anti-apartheid movements were quick to recognize the potential of using black consumer boycotts to prove

4 N. Green and R. Lascaris, 1990.

Communicating with the Third World: Seizing Advertising Opportunities in the 1990s (Cape Town: Tafelberg Human & Rousseau, 1990), 35–36.

the point. Clearly the market was signaling things must change.”⁵ History has shown that this fact was quickly recognized by advertisers and politicians alike. Activists successfully used it as a powerful political tool in the form of consumer boycotts to force political and commercial change.

The resulting paradigm shift required of the design establishment during the 1980s as apartheid began to crumble was enormous, and many designers were not particularly well equipped to cope with it. What it meant to be a South African meant different things to different people. The distinction as to whether the “new” South Africa was a multicultural or a multiculturalist society was not clear, and it could be argued that the nation still remains unclear—if not uncomfortable—with these issues. To be a designer in this type of environment is not for the fainthearted! However, the fact that design is a culturally sensitive industry cannot be ignored and, sadly, the demographics within the advertising industry were not (and still remain) unrepresentative of the majority market.

The GCIS hearings bear witness to this fact, and there is now a call for transformation to go beyond the “narrow roles that history has cast” in design. In many instances, the causes are structural. There is not only ignorance about the career opportunities in design on the part of previously marginalized groups, but also access to graphic design education remains limited for educational and economic reasons. Post-apartheid design education in South Africa demonstrates that once access has been created, there also is the challenge of making the education relevant and accessible. In this regard, the contribution of industry and the current lack of suitable role models needs to be addressed. Interestingly, Victor Margolin’s research of the marginalization of African American designers in Chicago indicates that this is not purely a South African problem.⁶ In view of the Parliamentary investigation into the state of transformation in the South African advertising industry, this is an issue that needs to be addressed on a priority basis.

Unfortunately, there are no quick fixes in education which, of necessity, is a slow process. In 1981 and 1982, respectively, Peninsula Technikon and my own department at the ML Sultan Technikon introduced the first graphic design programs for what has been euphemistically referred to as “historically disadvantaged” students. As historically disadvantaged institutions (HDIs) our task was made even more difficult in that, unlike the “other” technikons in our respective regions, we were underfunded. The majority of students applying for entry were truly disadvantaged in that they had been denied access to art or design education at school. Added to this were the limited financial resources available in the community to pay the fees, and the high equipment and material costs that graphic design demands. Thus, our admission criteria had to assess a student’s potential rather than proven skill and talent. On the basis of this acceptance, many families took loans against meager pensions to

5 Ibid.

6 V. Margolin, *African American Designers in Chicago* (Video) (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2001).

pay the enrollment fees. Many students were discouraged since the stakes were high and there were no guarantees of employment upon graduation. Even within the new paradigm, the low skills base of prospective students, the expense of graphic design education, and the extraordinary high expectations of industry remains a problem that needs to be addressed by all of the stakeholders.

Our experience at the ML Sultan Technikon⁷ is instructive in that we were the first graphic design program in South Africa to attract significant numbers of students from each of the three racial groups in the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) region during the late 1980s. Significantly this demographic shift occurred in advance of legislation that enabled official integration of higher education during the early 1990s. Hence we were the first to experience the challenge of multiculturalism, multilingualism, and multireligious sensitivities that characterize post-apartheid society. In spite of the best will in the world, we experienced an unacceptably high failure rate among students who were under-prepared. We had three very short years in which to teach basic skills and to train graphic designers for one of the few industries in South Africa that can be described as globally competitive. Added to this is the digital revolution in graphic design that demanded a much broader approach to visual communications. Financially, we had to cope with the expense of the design computers and relevant software because many of the entry-level jobs that our students were counting on were wiped out overnight due to the digital revolution.

For those who ask today—"Where are the black designers?"—the above were, and continue to be, the problems that confront all design educators who seek to contribute to the peaceful transformation of our society. As an attempt to address some of the problems, we introduced the Positive Response in Design Education (PRIDE) program in 1990. This affirmative action course acted as a one-year bridging program for students primarily from the townships and informal settlements around Durban. Initially funded by the De Beers Anglo American Chairman's Fund, it also was funded at one stage by the advertising agency Ogilvy, Mather, Rightford, Searle-Tripp and Makin.⁸

1990 also was the year of Nelson Mandela's release, and the uncertain negotiations and the civil unrest that preceded the elections in 1994 created a very volatile academic environment in which one was challenged not only to create access, but also to become culturally inclusive. Appropriate teaching methodologies were introduced to encourage teamwork and to redefine the notions of advantage and disadvantage so that students could learn from each other as equals. Individuals were encouraged to celebrate their own cultural background, while recognizing that culture is dynamic and forever changing. In the interim, the introduction of computer technology in the graphic design courses presented another challenge. Suffice it to say that technology is not culturally neutral, and in South Africa's

7 During 2002, the ML Sultan Technikon and Technikon Natal merged to form the Durban Institute of Technology (DIT).

8 PRIDE was funded by the De Beers Anglo American Chairman's Fund (1990-1993), the Bartel Arts Trust (1994-1995), Ogilvy, Mather, Rightford, Searle Tripp, and Makin (1996-1997); and USAID (1998-2000). Department of Art and Culture, Science and Technology, (2000-2002).

quest to create a new identity, students were encouraged to celebrate our unique culture and to explore their own sense of identity in order that their own signatures are carried onto the globalized software. This is not only an educational issue: the profession is equally challenged by the call for cultural inclusion.

As the political negotiations progressed in the early 1990s, there was a need to create a new identity for what then was popularly referred to as the “New South Africa,” inhabited by a “Rainbow Nation.” During this period, the notion of “nation building” became a theme adopted by politicians and advertisers.⁹ While symbols of the “old” South Africa such as the flag and sporting emblems such as the Springbok were reviewed, so elements of culture from South Africa’s former marginalized cultures provided a treasure trove for designers to create a new sense of a identity. Within this practice lay many dangers, not least of which was the issue of appropriation. However, in a postmodern world, this is not just a South African problem, but one that needs to be addressed on a global scale if professional practice is to retain its integrity and contribute to creating a new sense of balance in the world.

As part of the democratic process and, in an effort to create a notion of inclusion, the early 1990s were characterized by invitations to the general public to make submissions for projects ranging from the design of the “new” flag to the livery of the national airline (SAA). Although professionals ultimately were responsible for the finished design, there was an apparent popular consensus about the need to create an alternative that was distinctly “African.” What constitutes traditionally African, however, presents a problem. According to Pieterse, during the nineteenth century in popular novels, songs, and images, the “Zulu” frequently was used to represent Africa or black people to British and other audiences. He explains that the British admired the Zulus as a “martial race.”¹⁰ However, in a society in which ethnicity had been used by the apartheid state to divide and rule the majority, such stereotypical images were not acceptable. This was particularly so in a violent political environment in which the opposition Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) projected itself as a traditional Zulu cultural and political movement.

Consequently, according to Barbara Buntman, the notion of Zulu ethnicity on a symbolic level was more likely to inspire emotion and strong opinion than be an easily manipulated signifier available for the advertising agency’s uses as it had been in the past.¹¹ Buntman maintains that much of the above explains why Bushman/San images proved to be so attractive. The myth of the Bushman/San as harmless hunter gatherers allowed consumers to embrace the idea of being part of black Africa and multiracial South Africa without making the audience and consumer identify with other socio-political groups. Thus she maintains that the Bushman/San “became available for nation (or company) building.”¹² An

9 “Nation building” had been proposed in the late 1980s by the editor of the *Sowetan*, Aggrey Klaaste, as a non-governmental, self-help exercise. Green and Lascaris, *Communicating with the Third World*, 187.

10 J. N. Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 104.

11 B. Buntman, “Selling with the San: Representations of Bushman People and Artefacts in South African Print Advertisements” in *Visual Anthropology* 8 (Amsterdam, Holland: OPA [Overseas Publishers Association], 1996): 3354.

12 *Ibid.*

example of this is the logo for the South African Olympic bid in 1995. The superimposition convention used by the San to depict a number of hunters running together was copied by designers at Ogilvy & Mather from Patricia Vinnecombe's *Site B4* in the southern Drakensburg. In the logo design, the figures have been reversed to create a sense of forward movement, and the monochromatic figures have been rendered in the colors of the rainbow.¹³ The San rock art theme has provided official sponsors of the team, such as Vodacom, with a number of related ideas to create a variety of mainstream advertisements to promote their own products.

When the emphasis of South Africa's Olympic bid was broadened to be promoted as an "African" bid during 1995, the logo was changed to a map of Africa in which the "rainbow" was transformed into the striations of a zebra pelt. In the process, a well-used signifier of Africa—the zebra skin—became the symbol of the rainbow nation and Africa as a whole. This logo was, in fact, based on one developed by Iaan Bekker at Lindsay-Smithers-FCB for the Johannesburg City Council's unsuccessful civil bid in 1993. According to Bekker, the image of the continent and the colors were chosen to reflect:

... all associations that I considered good ones as opposed to the idea of darkest Africa—which I think is a completely colonial and imperial throwback to previous centuries. I tried to depoliticize the whole approach, and to concentrate on a purely physical reference to the continent.¹⁴

Notwithstanding the dangers of advertisers using "ethnic" imagery it is significant to note that the mural painting and beadwork of a minority group, the Ndebele, also came to be widely used in South African design during this period. Once again, it could be argued that the influence of the dominant consumer group was the deciding factor in this choice in that the refined colors and strict geometry of Ndebele design has parallels in European modernism. Hence, commenting upon the popularity of the "Ndebele style," Ivor Powell makes the point that "one is far more likely to see Ndebele designs in the suburbs of traditionally white cities than in the traditionally black townships."¹⁵ In this way, the "ethnic" has become a commodity largely devoid of its original meaning that has been used by others for either political or commercial purposes. Hence "Ndebele-like" paintings are used to "decorate" litter bins in Durban in the heart of KwaZulu-Natal and *Coca-Cola*, a global product with a strong American identity, attempted to create a local identity by using a visual and verbal pun with their "Afri-can" by using similar motifs (c. 1996).

This type of adornment has not only been limited to products and their promotion, but also has been placed on buildings. Significantly, in an attempt at "Africanization," the neo-classical buildings of the South African National Gallery (SANG) in Cape Town have been decorated by Ndebele women. The logo for the

13 The term "rainbow nation," suggesting unity in diversity, was coined during the struggle by Archbishop Desmond Tutu after protesters had been sprayed by the police with purple dye. During the transitional period, he used the term to symbolize unity in the "new" nation. By the time of the Olympic bid, the term had gained widespread usage throughout South Africa.

14 I. Bekker, "FOR AFRICA: The Visual Identity for the Johannesburg Olympic Bid" in *Image and Text, A Journal for Design* (3) April 1994, (Pretoria: University of Pretoria): 7.

A full interview with Bekker and a comprehensive display of the application of the Johannesburg bid identity is featured in the April 1994 edition of *Image and Text*.

15 I. Powell, *Ndebele—A People and their Art* (Cape Town: Struik Publishers, 1995).

SANG is a clear indication of how this, in turn, provides a series of postcolonialist, post-modernist opportunities for the graphic designer to merge the neo-classical architectural form with an African identity. By 1997, this convention had been exhausted and in a *Mail and Guardian* article titled “Struggling to Relate to Africa,” Nkwenkwe Nkomo a, judge at the Loerie Awards, described the entries which featured appropriated Ndebele design or a Basotho blanket as “bongo-bongo ads ... lack[ing] a South African identity.”¹⁶

Another signifier of an African identity that was widely used was neither an ethnic motif nor an intrinsically African technique. It was the relief printing technique—the linocut. The Indian academic Uday Athavanker has noted that, although certain materials and techniques may not be specific to a region, it is how they are used within a culture that creates the sense of identity.¹⁷ Thus, relief printing may be a global medium but the lino prints by artists trained at the Rorkes Drift Mission school such as John Muafangejo (1943–1987) and Azaria Mbatha (b. 1941) differ from those of the European modernists such as Picasso (1881–1973).

An early example of using this technique to reposition corporate interests with the notion of nation building and a new sense of identity was Riccardo Cappeci’s work for the Chamber of Mines—“Mining. The Foundation of Our Nation” (1989). A close analysis of the images of workers and managers with their bold distortions and perspective emphasizing hands and machines is reminiscent of the socialist spirit of the Mexican revolution in murals of Diego Rivera (1886–1957) and, significantly, the posters and murals that Ben Shahn (1898–1969) produced for the U.S. Federal Arts project. The idea that the art and crafts of a specific region carries a strong sense of identity is not unique to South Africa. However, it is significant that after the 1994 elections, designers increasingly took to the streets in search of a vernacular language that carried an equally strong sense of identity.

One of the curious characteristics of globalization is the almost inevitable desire for local and regional cultures to assert themselves in the face of global homogenization. It is in this context that the Durban designer Garth Walker’s *i-jusi* functions. *i-jusi* is a special publication which is produced by Walker’s agency, Orange Juice Design (OJD), to stimulate debate about the nature of national, regional, and local identity in graphic design in South Africa (Walker 2001 “*i-jusi*” 3 Durban: OJD). In the commercial sphere, OJD’s design for the Durban’s Metropolitan Tourism Authority initiative “Durban Africa” which is based on the design of a traditional Zulu earplug, provides one of the most graphic indications of the paradigm shift that has taken place in on a regional basis.

Before the 1950s the traditional Zulu earplug was worn in a hole pierced in the lobe of the ear as part of a ceremony marking a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood.¹⁸ By the 1950s, the ear-

16 *Mail and Guardian*, June 6 to 12, 1997.

17 U. A. Athavanker, “Objects and Cultural Notions: Design Challenges in the Developing World,” paper presented at 3rd International Design Education Forum of Southern Africa, “Design for Developing Countries” conference, CSIR, Pretoria, 24-27 March 1997, Pretoria RSA: Pretoria Technikon: 2.

18 F. Jolles, “Zulu Earplugs—A Study in Transformation” in *African Arts* Spring 1997 (Los Angeles: University of California): 49.

piercing ceremony had lost its ritual significance and had become cosmetic among a specific group of rural men who had migrated into Durban, for whom it was of a particular significance. These were the men who were employed to clean the floors of the hotels and flats in the city. This subcultural group identified themselves by wearing earplugs that were decorated with motifs derived from the logo of the Sunbeam wax polish can.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, these earplugs came to be highly sought after by collectors as attitudes towards the indigenous arts and crafts shifted. Significantly, Walker had used the starburst motif of the Zulu earplug for a mandala as a signifier of regional identity for the Durban Art Gallery (DAG). This poster design was intended to express the cultural shift that the DAG had made from a Victorian collection as its centerpiece to one which reflected the multicultural nature of the city. Therefore, in both of these works, we see the transformation of a specific identity for a traditional rite of passage ceremony, to rural migrant worker adornment during the 1950s, to a celebration of the post-apartheid city as a global tourist destination in the twenty-first century. This transformation reveals just how great the shift in South Africa has been, and how graphic design in South Africa bears witness to it.

Given that the government now has requested that the marketing and advertising industries account for themselves, one can only assume that the period I have just described is merely the first phase of the real paradigm shift that is to take place in South Africa. The final nature of this shift in South African design is still subject to speculation. However, given the increasingly rapid transformation of the education system at all levels, it is inevitable that professional practice soon will be enriched by growing numbers of practitioners who already possess a different world view. This is the view that will eventually enhance and inform the development of a new South African design philosophy and aesthetic. While this process may already have begun as a natural consequence of change in the country, there is the hope that it is an indication that “within our borders, the material and symbolic conditions for open exchange” finally will have been established.

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In Marketing Across Cultures: Are You Enlightening the World or are You Speaking in Tongues?

Thomas Oosthuizen

You probably understand the title of this article if you are a Christian. If you are not, you probably do not. That is how important frame-of-reference is in communication. Humans internalize communications within their frame-of-reference and experience. If communication is conceived outside of that, it often is either misunderstood or not understood at all. Yet, today in marketing, communication mostly is conceived by a small minority for a vast majority of recipients. Recipients will either understand such communication, which means that it will achieve its core objectives to sell or persuade, or they will not understand it, resulting in marketers standing little chance of achieving their objectives. The opportunity cost of marketing therefore is huge: there often is only one chance to convince a market.

Despite years of talking about globalization, real global brands with significant market shares all around the world are few. In many places, notably Europe, Latin America, and South East Asia, local brands still do well in many fast-moving consumer goods categories. The implication has to be that many of these brands satisfy local needs, hence retain their local strengths. The global brands that have been dramatically successful mainly stem from the United States of America, Japan or selected European countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany, France, or Italy. Whereas the United States and Japan, tend to dominate with mass global brands including McDonalds, Coca-Cola, Pepsi, Microsoft, Sony, and Toyota, Europe tends to dominate the specialist areas of chemicals, pharmaceuticals, fashion, food, wine, tourism, and luxury goods.¹

A major caveat for globalization is how to straddle, on the one hand, the economies of scale integral to international distribution with sales and local customs, needs and peculiarities on the other hand. It is fair to say that most international brands have achieved global status through sheer trade, distribution and marketing clout, rather than through excellence in matching local needs. In the process, these brands have attained the status of global icons, becoming cultural systems in their own right that speak a universal language from Lima to Jakarta. So, the globalization of business still faces a unique challenge: namely, to successfully customize a message to a specific market in a given socio-economic and cultural context, while retaining the appeal of a global cultural icon. For most fast-moving consumer or mass-consumer goods categories, greater

¹ H. McRae, *The World in 2020* (London: Harper Collins, 1994).

market penetration is a function of the degree to which a global brand speaks successfully to the local community in a language and idiom it can relate to, and therefore find more appealing than local brands.

This can be achieved either by:

- 1 Creating marketing unique to every single society (the “bottom-up” approach); or
- 2 Creating marketing that looks at universal symbols and ideas, and customizes them to accentuate unique socio-economic and cultural differences (the “top-down” approach).

The former has the built-in potential to segregate and be inefficient in its application. The latter has the possibility to create great new brand concepts, ideas, and efficiencies in marketing, as well as its own “language systems.” Unfortunately, most brand communication to date has evolved to fall somewhere between these two approaches, it is neither fully “localized,” nor is it fully “globalized.” Although, numerically, not many brands can be called truly global, the trend towards globalization is real and accelerating, despite concerns evident in growing reactions to groups such as the World Trade Organization, and to particular icons such as McDonalds and other American brand icons.²

Global brand icons including Nike, Phillips, Sony, IBM, and Coca-Cola transcend cultures, and their names and imagery have become language systems in their own right. The imagery associated with Coca-Cola probably is the biggest common language system in the world. There are even debates concerning the relevance of conveying the name Coca-Cola in different languages! Brand iconography truly has resulted in a third dimension of speech and human interface. Yet, most graphic design and marketing communications for brands do not succeed on a multicultural level.

Globalization and an Approach That Communicates With the Lowest Common Denominator

Many brands equate the term globalization with creating images that appeal to the lowest common denominator. Countless household goods and personal products are marketed in a pedestrian fashion in places from China and Hong Kong, to the United Arab Emirates and Latin America. The reality is that these brands not only miss an opportunity, they probably only “work” because of such marketing resources as trade backing and massive advertising budgets behind them. The mere fact that a product is globally marketed creates great desirability among “upwardly mobile” people around the world, regardless of race, creed, culture, or language.

Multinational companies, whose products must appeal to the mass-market and who therefore have to communicate across cultures, have the tendency to translate advertising and design

2 N. Klein, *No Logo* (London: Flamingo, 2001).

piecemeal from one language to another, with a resultant loss of comprehension at the receiving end. Head-office-generated material for many multinationals often is badly translated into host languages, with a resultant loss of creative idiom, and without the addition of information content or emotional appeal that is of real value to regional consumers. If Irish humor is not understood nor appreciated, much of what would be a great advertisement in Ireland is wasted on a consumer in another country.

After the 2001 Cannes Advertising Festival, the editorial comment in *AdAge Global* pointed to the difficulty Western judges have in empathizing with concepts created in non-Western, third-world economies.³ The editorial suggests that judges simply do not relate to these concepts and, hence, do not see the relevance of a particular advertisement's appeal to a given market. This argument also crops up when South African advertising awards are judged. South Africa, with its diverse history and eleven official languages, frequently poses a problem for judges. The marketing industry often is accused of Eurocentricity, unable to fairly evaluate marketing material conceptualized from the perspective of the indigenous peoples of this country, or even from the point of white Afrikaans speaking audiences.⁴

White South African creative personnel, likewise, find it difficult to create advertising or graphic design that appeals relevantly and motivationally across cultures. Even black creative people in marketing and design in South Africa, often are socioeconomically so removed from certain black markets, that they find it difficult to create material that appeals to the emotions of these audiences. Most conceptual approaches also assume greater synergy between market segments, which often is not correct. Mass-markets generally consist of numerous and diverse subsegments, each with their own languages and idioms. Yet, speak to many of the leading graphic designers in South Africa, and they will tell you that very few clients target their communications to truly appeal across cultural groupings or segments—resulting in a huge opportunity lost to engender stakeholder support and motivation. Not even in safety, health and environment reports, designed to be inclusive, is this principle properly practiced.

There is little difference if we compare how multinational agencies and marketers approach advertising targeted at consumers in places such as the United Arab Emirates, China, or South East Asia. Much of this advertising is devoid of any creative concept, so it lacks the ability to challenge and excite a consumer. This means marketers miss a huge opportunity, and thus under-leverage their communication.

In a new era of “universalism,” recognition of where customers come from will be as important as the simple appeal of universality. For marketers and designers, this is not difficult or impossible

3 S. Hatfield, “Cannes must face up to its advertising prejudices,” *AdAge Global* (July 9, 2001).

4 J. Farquhar, “The Big Idea” *Advantage* (August 2000).

to do. In recognizing people for who they are, business also recognizes humanity in its great diversity of expression, yet similarity of emotions.

The “top-down” approach to marketing has the ability to generate global icons, while retaining relevance to local needs and affiliations.

What Makes Communication Work?

Communication generally is a function of three things:

- 1 Relevance to target market needs (telling consumers what they believe they need to know to purchase a given product or brand);
- 2 Language (using a language the market understands); and
- 3 Empathy (employing a stylistic and idiomatic manner the market likes and finds appealing to its emotions, senses, and intellect).

These elements create a frame-of-reference within which communications are received and understood. Generally, most marketers and designers will agree with the importance of relevance to needs and the importance of choice of language. People do not buy that which they do not need, either emotionally or rationally, and they do not relate to what they do not comprehend. The area that causes most concern in global marketing is the area of empathy. This is the area most lost in the direct translation of marketing communications. Without empathy, the “magic” of shared meaning is not possible. This “magic” adds value to a brand.

The problem is not whether a piece of communication tells a story to the consumer, it is rather whether the consumer likes it and empathizes with it. Millward Brown, a South African company, has tested more than 20,000 television commercials, and has a larger database on the impact of likeability on the noting and retention of commercials than perhaps any company globally. Much of their work assesses the importance of empathy and emotional involvement in generating conviction.⁵ Similarly, work done by Hofmeyer and Rice⁶ underscores the importance of brand image on the impact of international marketing messages. Barbara Cooke, the only woman marketer in South Africa to date who has won the coveted Protea Award for marketing excellence, has done much research regarding the importance of language and emotional involvement in advertising. She has clearly highlighted the importance of emotional bonding in communicating successfully with a market.⁷

Historically, certain themes can cross cultural divides. A sporting event such as the Olympic games is a powerful unifying symbol. South Africa was emotionally united when it won the 1995 Rugby World Cup, and President Nelson Mandela appeared in the team captian’s number six rugby jersey.⁸ Did every South African suddenly love rugby? No, but the appeal of pride in victory is a

5 E. Du Plessis, “Understanding and Using Likeability,” *Journal of Advertising Research* (September/October, 1994).

6 R. Hofmeyer and B. Rice, *Commitment-led Marketing* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2000).

7 B. Cooke, *The Case for Own Language Communication* (Johannesburg: National Media (internal research paper, 1991).

8 This image remains a potent symbol of unity for most South Africans.

universal thing anyone anywhere can understand and associate with. A comparable historical example demonstrating the ability to unite people was the Falklands War that brought pride back to the United Kingdom. A current one is the threat of terrorism uniting a politically divided United States behind President Bush.

Music is a universal symbol youth around the world relate to. Whether you walk into a club in London, Jakarta, Tokyo, New York, Paris, Sydney, Milan, Johannesburg, or Buenos Aires, the music is the same, the fashions will be comparable and, generally, many of the icons will be similar, as will be the emotional experience and feeling of belonging among the people. The entertainment industry in the United States has been called "imperialist" for setting the global "agenda" of what is "cool" and what is not. Yet, all it does is to create unifying symbols people around the world can relate to.

In marketing, universal appeal often is less evident. A good example of marketing crossing the cultural divides, was when various Budweiser "Wassup" advertisements, created from one central advertisement, successfully appealed to different market segments in the United States. Essentially, the campaign universalized an African-American colloquialism. The CNN approach to the American response to the events of September 11, paradoxically illustrates that the same message does not appeal to all people around the world. Whereas most people will agree with the threat of and response to terrorism, the importance of revealing all sides of the story is vital for many countries. Some brands themselves have created an inherent ability to represent cultures. Absolut Vodka and Camel are brands with universal appeal, but creative applications are adapted for countries, cities, cultures, or even subcultures.

The challenge is simple yet complex. It is to create global brand icons by elevating concepts and ideas from one culture or subsegment to global status, and by interpreting and appealing uniquely to individual cultures, similar to the way Budweiser, Camel cigarettes, and Absolut Vodka have done. This leads to the leveraging of a brand icon at the global level, creating efficiencies, and yet retaining local market appeal and uniqueness, which expands brand penetration into markets and forms a global front against purely local brands. Although this is conceptually simple, it remains the exception rather than the rule in marketing communications.

Diversity Remains the Most Important Ingredient of Future Creativity

When people who work together are too alike, a phenomenon called "groupthink" emerges. This means they increasingly start thinking alike in a conditioned fashion. Generally, the more homogeneous a group, the less likely it is that one of its members will break the prevailing pattern of behavior.⁹ When diverse persons or groups start cooperating, new paradigms of thinking emerge. This is a very powerful stimulus for creativity. So the reality is that, despite all the

9 H.C. Marais, *Aspekte van Massakommunikasie* (Bloemfontein: P J de Villiers, 1980).

moves to the contrary such as cultural implosion and the disappearance of languages, one needs diversity to create fresh new products, brands, and thinking patterns. The convergence of such diversity generally means the new solution is more lateral, which is exactly the opposite of massification and standardization.

The United States and Europe still lead the headlines when it comes to marketing thinking, with few newcomers penetrating this group. Can the developing world offer assistance in how one speaks to a multicultural world? Yes, it certainly can, because it deals with this challenge daily. Brazil has become a global example of a country that uses its diversity to create great conceptual communications. Its emergence as a serious global challenger for advertising excellence is evident from its status at the last few Cannes Advertising Festivals.

The developed world probably has exhausted many of its sources of creativity, creative stimuli, and differentiation. In some instances, creativity has become an end in itself, resulting in communication that is exceedingly esoteric and intellectual. Product design has tended to gravitate towards the super-rich with form privileging function. The third world has the ability to generate new creative drivers in all facets of design, benefiting both the developed and developing world. On the one hand, the third world is grappling with problems that are real and tangible, evidenced, and experienced by ordinary people in their daily struggles to survive. Function at a low price prevails, and form needs to enhance function, nothing more. At this stage, design has to work towards the betterment of the community—the basic job it was designed to perform. On the other hand, the developing world also possesses qualities and creative canvasses with which to enrich, change, and stimulate design. It has a vast lexicon that can be tapped and incorporated into the resource, process, and discipline bases of the developed world.

An interesting comparison identifies some critical differences between Africa and the West:¹⁰

| West | Africa |
|------------------------|----------------------------|
| Outcome / results | Process |
| Cold climates / people | Warm climates / people |
| Laws / regulations | Consultation / negotiation |
| The contract | Trust |

South Africa is truly a symbol of diversity and, like Brazil, could be an example of great creativity in communicating across cultures. Generally, South Africa does well creatively around the world, but it does not practice multiculturalism as a global example yet. Many of its winning communications could as easily have been conceptualized in London or New York. Yet there are some notable local exceptions. Advertising for the South African company Sasol Oil is a good example. This advertising is well-liked across language and cultural groupings in its home country. Expressions such as

10 Author unknown: *Wits Alumni Breakfast* (Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand, 1994).

“amaglug-glug,” “windy-windy” and “woema”¹¹ have become icons for the brand. These icons cross cultural groupings, despite being conceived from a very specific cultural idiom. The idioms have become “universalized” in their applications, yet their applications still can be customized to appeal to subsegments of the market. Similarly, the term “Yebo-gogo”¹² has entered national consciousness and popular use through advertisements for the South African mobile telephone company Vodacom.

South Africans increasingly are grappling with the characteristics and problems of diversity and multicultural communication. Attempts are being made to arrive at a systematic understanding that could enhance lateral thinking and foster greater creativity.

Towards a Scheme to Aid Multiculturalism

Historically, communication was created individually for all the racial and language groups in South Africa. Materials therefore were produced in English, Afrikaans, South Sotho, North Sotho, and so on. Language comprehension certainly is maximized if creative concepts are created separately, but this approach is largely impractical, costly, and divisive. Rarely were all such communications well conceptualized in terms of idiom. The result often was that some markets saw themselves presented in a derogatory or stereotypical manner, or that some communications were done well, and some badly. Conceptually, a brand can hardly become a global icon using an approach such as this. In my view, a better approach is to look at what frame-of-reference is shared by diverse target audiences. Such a shared meaning can be used very effectively when communicating across cultures or countries.

These thoughts led me, some years ago, to consider a scheme that could be applied when communicating across cultures without having to recreate marketing communications from scratch for different cultures, thereby dividing rather than unifying. The intention was to aid the formulation of marketing communication that appeals to different cultures, without losing the central strategic thread. The scheme links two theoretical approaches to create a new model of how such marketing can be approached. The two approaches used are Kurt Lewin’s field theory¹³ and the Rokeach value theory.¹⁴

Lewin’s field theory states that a person is surrounded by a “life space” at any point in time. A person occupies a certain place in this life space and, within this space, moves towards goals that constantly affect behavior. A person therefore “floats” in a perceptual field, and this influences how he or she views things and behaves. Man thus is “a complex energy field, motivated by psychological forces, and behaving selectively and creatively.”¹⁵ Rokeach, in turn, created a widely accepted ranking of values that impact on human behavior, and hence responses to products and brands.

My scheme marries the two concepts. Man existing within an energy field (here looked at as the proximity of sets of values)

11 Colloquialisms adopted from indigenous words and descriptions.

12 Zulu for “Yes granny.”

13 K. Lewin, *Resolving Social Conflicts: Selected Papers on Group Dynamics* (New York: Harper Row, 1948).

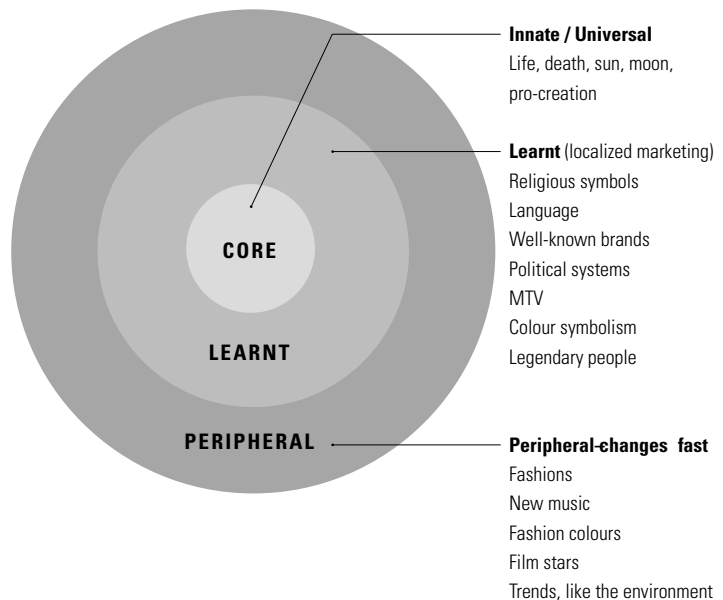
14 M. Rokeach, *Beliefs, Attitudes and Values: A Theory of Organization and Change* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1973).

15 C. S. Hall, C S and G. Lindsey, “Lewin’s Field Theory” in *Themes of Personality* (New York: Wiley, 1970).

is linked to a different (my own) ranking of value systems. The ranking of values is based on their consistency over time and their dependency upon birth (core values), versus their dependence upon culture/socialization (secondary values), versus their dependency upon a specific time period (peripheral values). This merger, termed “the core value model,” serves a number of functions. It assists the adaptation of global brands to local markets and customers without losing the universality of approach needed to cross cultures. It aids the identification of elements that should be retained in brands when they are changed, and which should be updated. Finally, it highlights areas where cultural differences in branding are important and can be leveraged for greater market penetration.

The core value model systematically looks at symbols that can be used to communicate with people from any culture or from diverse cultures. “Core values” are universal values common to all cultures. “Learned/secondary or socialized values” are values true to certain cultures (e.g., religion), but also values that have been established through universal communications (e.g., by Coca-Cola, CNN, or MTV). “Peripheral” values change fast, and usually are connected to the trends of the day (e.g., fashion and music styles). Generally, core values and learned values are best used to discriminate between brands, whereas peripheral values are generic but add a contemporary dimension to a piece of communication.

Figure 1
Core values can create a universal language.



According to many psychologists and anthropologists,¹⁶ man always has had universal symbols that are understood by everyone, regardless of race, creed, language, level of education, or economic status. They represent values that are innate and include things such as life, death, birth, sex, food, the sun, the moon, rain, air, wind,

16 Notably Carl Jung. (C. G. Jung, *Man and His Symbols* (London: Aldus, 1964).



Figure 2
South African Coat of Arms.

blood, the concepts “good” and “bad,” and the identity and roles of man and woman. They unify, regardless of where people come from. These symbols go back to the earliest of times, and were used, for example, by the ancient cultures of Mesopotamia and Egypt, the Mayans, the Incas, and the Aztecs. Depictions of these symbols are, among other things on bathroom doors across the world, and also on cultural items including the ancient calendar of the Aztecs. In the span of history, these symbols have retained their original meaning.

In the new South African coat of arms, designed by Iaan Bekker from the agency Foote Cone Belding South Africa, universal symbols are used powerfully to integrate a nation, and to create a sense of the future. The emblem is rooted in where South Africans come from, and their foundation and ascendance. It incorporates products of the earth, fauna, and flora such as elephant tusks, the protea, wheat sheath, and the secretary bird. The secretary bird protects, guards, and indicates vision. The sun conveys light and strength, it shows direction, it illuminates, and creates a future. Linton stone figures of prehistoric human beings in South Africa face each other, creating a sense of looking at heritage, but also towards the future. Although few people will understand the full scope of all of the symbols contained in the coat of arms, most South Africans can relate to some, or most of them. In fact, most people around the world will understand these symbols. Core values therefore serve to “earth” communications, since their meaning is relevant in all cultures.

Core brand appeals should contain core values in order to be universal. Examples of this often are visible in the interplay between sexes, used for decades to advertise deodorants or perfume, or in the universal promise of youth and sex appeal contained in most cosmetics and fashion marketing. Even James Bond used the interplay of “good” and “bad.” Core values appeal universally and therefore “ground” a brand, giving it meaning wherever it may be found, across the world and across cultures. A brand such as Marlboro is very successful in terms of its strong, universal masculine appeal. Coca-Cola relies on the universal appeal of life-giving refreshment when one is thirsty, and McDonalds banks on a sense of universal belonging or “family togetherness.” The Nike “swoosh” trades on what is “right” (versus what is “wrong”), and therefore, what is achievable (“just do it”). With the international launch of AngloGold, the world’s largest gold producer, core symbols were used extensively to appeal to different cultures and socio-economic groups in a universal manner. Although most of these are manifested in an African lexicon and context, their meaning is universal.

Often brand differentiation takes place on the next level, the learned value level. In a multicultural context, idiom and frame-of-reference differences are created at this level. Thus, this level offers a great opportunity to take a global message and localize

it. Learned values are not innate, they are learned in a process of cultural socialization. These values emerge from language, cultural norms, social practices, folklore and beliefs, fairy tales, legends, and the unique ways of nations around the world. Good examples are the finite linguistic differences in a given language, the idioms used in expression, for example Irish and British humor, the dollar sign as the prototypical symbol for capitalism, and the names Karl Marx and Hitler, and the emotions they evoke. Learned values distinguish between cultures, for instance the way the West and Middle East differ in how women are treated and exposed in marketing, or how explicitly products for birth control or sanitary protection are referred to. The localization of brands such as Camel and Absolut Vodka fosters acceptance because, beyond the universal icons they have created, they use local symbols of cities or customs to forge a more direct appeal.

Colors have a rich significance in cultures, such as red for the Chinese and the earthy colors of Africa in the South African coat of arms. Mexico and Spain globally “own” bright colors, and Northern Europe generally is associated with more subdued colors. The Christian cross, the Koran, and the hammer and sickle all are symbols that have attained very particular meanings for groups of people. Elvis Presley, the Beatles, the Statue of Liberty, James Bond, and Walt Disney all are examples of learned meaning. Similarly, most brand icons fall in this category—the meaning of Coca-Cola, Nike, Benetton, Diesel, Sony, and Disney were acquired. Empathy in multicultural communication is difficult to achieve if marketers and designers do not possess a clear understanding of the significance of symbolic distinctions in various cultures. Some obvious contradictions create comical outrage, such as calling a computer company Apple or a mobile network Orange. So it is possible to create a personal lexicon!

The third tier comprises peripheral values that are fast-changing and transient, typically contained in the examples of sport stars who are famous for short periods of time, film stars, and types of music. These examples symbolize a given time and context. They appeal universally to markets around the world for a limited time, until the next trend surfaces. Fashions are another good example of this value set. Peripheral values drive evolution, like the adaptations to the Shell logo and identity, and the changes in style for the brand Betty Crocker. A brand has to periodically update its appeal to markets. Peripheral symbols help to modernize and rejuvenate a brand, for instance the petroleum company BP is capturing the global trend towards “greening” by literally turning green into its property and further expanding the idea through the new “sunflower” logo Laundor launched for them a few years ago. Some brands use peripheral values almost as if they were core values. The importance of the latest research and development, and thus new product design, have become core values for Apple computers and Nokia

mobile telephones. As a trendsetter, retaining the initiative is critical if a brand embarks on such a course. It is easy to lose this initiative and, once lost, it may be very difficult to regain.

Conclusion

Graphic design always has had the power to create powerful images that are able to ignite excitement, exuberance, and a fresh perspective. Through the striking images of dancers and the can-can, the artist Toulouse-Lautrec conveyed the brilliance, excitement, and dynamism that evokes the Moulin Rouge to this day. The images that Andy Warhol created of Brillo boxes and Campbell soup cans, elevated these ordinary products to legendary status, far beyond anything mere marketing could do. The reality is that good graphic design has the capability to transcend culture, background, economic status, and language. Despite this, one sees little of the brilliance that graphic design is capable of emerging today. Too often, graphic design practitioners apply low budgets to the creation of pedestrian communications.

Most multicultural design operates from a base of lowest common denominator images. Such communication probably is understandable to consumers and meets their needs, but is not really successful in engendering consumer empathy—leveraging this third dimension is what creates real brand or communication power. Not utilizing design's potential is a great opportunity lost for business, resulting in a profound "undersell" of products and services. Marketers often do not demand that designers be sensitive and authoritative when devising communications for diverse cultures. A major opportunity today is to create new global icons that transcend cultures, yet retain unique appeal to local markets. This could be called the "top-down approach" to global marketing. To aid this approach, greater insight and consumer understanding on the part of design and marketing agencies is urgently needed.

The developing world has the ability to help design and marketing communication by introducing an understanding of diversity that could enhance lateral thinking and foster greater creativity. South Africa often has been called a racial microcosm of the world. Here one communicates, even within one's own company, with many different cultures and socioeconomic groups on a daily basis. One can either grasp this huge opportunity and create a common set of values within one's company and among one's customers and stakeholders, or one can simply see it as a rote task that needs to be done. Worse, one can be insensitive to the challenges and opportunities cross-cultural communications pose.

Tapping into a shared frame-of-reference is vital in communicating across cultures. In this regard, this article proposes a three-tier core value model to aid marketing and brand communication. The core value model provides insight and understanding into how brands are launched, and how they evolved. It suggests that

a brand should appeal to innate, learned or peripheral values. Core values unify through the use of universal symbols. Learned values identify cultural idiosyncrasies. Peripheral values are trend—and context—specific, yet they offer powerful tactics with which to draw diverse peoples together.

The *Siyazama* Project: A Traditional Beadwork and AIDS Intervention Program

Kate Wells, Edgard Sienaert, and
Joan Conolly

This article is first and foremost descriptive: it gives an account of the origin and development of the *Siyazama* Project, both as a design communication and AIDS intervention program among the Zulu women of rural KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. It also is analytic, since it explains the effect and effectiveness of beadwork as a visual metaphoric mode of expression. It demonstrates how the beadwork and craft of the women in the *Siyazama* Project act as reliable and authoritative modes of communication to circumvent the Zulu cultural taboo on the discussion of matters of personal intimacy (*hlonipha*), and the women's lack of English and scribal writing, all of which threaten to render them powerless, silent and invisible in the war against AIDS. The beadwork designs of the rural women of KwaZulu-Natal successfully transcend accepted traditional modes and norms, and challenge socio-cultural, health, and economic issues that threaten their lives and the lives of their families and communities. The *Siyazama* project thus has changed and is changing the self- and community image of those most affected by the AIDS pandemic. It is only a matter of time before such transformation impinges on their society as a whole, providing a significant example of the role of design as an agent of social transformation.

The AIDS Pandemic

It is estimated that some 43 million people globally are affected with HIV, with 95 percent living in developing countries. It also is estimated that 24 million people currently are living with the virus in sub-Saharan Africa. South Africa has 4.2 million infected people, amounting to more than ten percent of the population. People aged between 20- and 44-years-old are the most vulnerable.¹ KwaZulu-Natal has the highest infection rate of all nine provinces in South Africa, an observation based on rural and peri-urban women attending antenatal clinics in KwaZulu-Natal.² In KwaZulu-Natal, HIV/AIDS is largely a heterosexual disease infecting many more women than men, because women are far more susceptible to infection than men partly due to their physiological makeup. Empirical evidence shows that the rate of transmission from male to female to be two to five times higher than from female to male.

1 A. Whiteside and C. Sunter, *AIDS: The Challenge for South Africa* (Cape Town: Human and Rousseau Tafelberg, 2000), 58.

2 *Ibid.*, 51.

The hard-hitting social consequences of the disease, especially on poverty-stricken rural populations, challenge the very existence of many communities. It is clear that HIV/AIDS can no longer be considered purely a health-related problem. The country's economy is particularly vulnerable due to the interdependence between the sophisticated industrial infrastructure balanced against the sprawling, informal rural sector. In such an environment and climate, any AIDS intervention program must address more than the immediate health issues. It must attempt to transform the related socio-cultural context, values, and expectations.

Beadwork Design in KwaZulu-Natal

Historically, the beadwork of KwaZulu-Natal took the form of linear syntax or single beaded strands until approximately 100 years ago when a new form—beadfabric—was developed.³ This is symbolically important because it allowed the development of geometrical patterning primarily based on a triangular representation of the father, mother and child.⁴ The best known example of beadfabric is the loveletter (*ibique*), a popular souvenir with tourists visiting Durban. It generally is sold attached to a safety pin, and has a small card that details its meaning. The design primarily comprises inter-linked geometric forms relating to male/female relationships. All traditional Zulu beadwork relates in some way to courtship and marriage. Colors have significant meanings—both positive and negative. Specific meanings may be emphasized in any given piece by increasing the volume of beads, thus heightening bead color saturation.

In 1980, the women beadworkers from the Valley of a Thousand Hills initiated a radically new direction in beadwork. Thembi Mchunu, one of a small group of expert beadworkers from this region, constructed a doll with scraps of fabric, accessorized with beautiful beadwork. Thembi's fellow beadworkers, including her co-wives, followed her direction and the craft soon developed into a most unusual and fascinating form of social commentary. The beaded cloth dolls sold well, resulting in much needed improvement in household incomes.

It is self-evident that the sustainability of any rural craft industry is dependent on the quality of its craftwork which must be acceptable to a highly discerning international tourist market. This only can be achieved if the crafted items are well-made and innovatively designed. In 1995, it had become apparent in KwaZulu-Natal that the quality of the beaded dolls was not meeting the standards required. Between 1996/1997, Kate Wells from the Department of Design Studies at ML Sultan Technikon, (now the Durban Institute of Technology, D.I.T.) organized a series of workshops to provide the beadworkers with the necessary technical skills and quality materials funded by an international donor. The response was gratifying, and

3 Papini, personal communication, 1999.

4 S. Schoeman, "Eloquent Beads: The Semantics of a ZULU Art Form" in *Africa Insight* 13: 2 (1983).

the quality of the dolls improved to such an extent that they soon were once more in demand by local craft and souvenir outlets.

During the 1996/1997 workshops, the women discussed the problems that they were encountering in their lives: issues of critical socio-cultural importance. This “gossip,” a form of “information management,”⁵ was highly significant since it revolved around the illness of so many people in the community. What initially was referred to as “Slim’s disease”—the term used to describe the deteriorating condition of HIV/AIDS—included suspicion about possible rivalries in love and power relations, and about forthcoming marriages and other important rituals. From the workshop interactions, Wells became aware that the women were largely ignorant about HIV/AIDS, in spite of the development, in 1996, by Happiness Ngoma of beadfabric in the form of an *ibique* of the AIDS red ribbon that had originated in the United Kingdom. In its simplicity, the beadfabric AIDS red ribbon is a primordial balanced and rhythmic formula consisting of a pair of triangles one, of which is closed and the other open. At first, it had no significance for the women other than it provided much needed income. When the women later became aware of the meaning of this visual metaphor, it conveyed a profound message of life and death, thus effectively triggering awareness of AIDS, promoting care for the sick, and encouraging behavioral change. Currently, there are very few beaded tableaus and dolls that do not feature at least one AIDS red ribbon.



Figure 1
Beadfabric AIDS red ribbon. Created by Happiness Ngoma. Photo by Kate Wells, © Copyright 2004 Kate Wells.

Beadfabric AIDS Red Ribbon

By 1998, Wells knew that she was morally obliged to broach the highly sensitive subject of HIV/AIDS with the beadworkers in the workshops. When she did so, they agreed with alacrity to a series of workshops and meetings with personnel of the Durban City Environmental Health Authority, The National Association of People Living with AIDS (NAPWA), the Kuyasa Devoted Artists, and The Shembe Virgins. During these workshops, they were informed about the origin, nature, transmission, prevention, and prognosis of “Slim’s Disease.” They heard, inter alia, that HIV/AIDS primarily was transmitted through sexual intercourse; that abstinence from sexual intimacy was the only guarantee against contraction of the dreaded and fatal disease; that the use of condoms constituted protected sex; that there was no vaccine or cure for the condition; and that it was transmitted from mother to child during childbirth, and that such transmission would prove fatal for the child in the majority of cases.

The women responded with characteristic silence. Because of the sexual nature of HIV/AIDS transmission, this was a subject of the deepest traditional taboo: *hlonipha*. Consequently, the response of the women to the information provided at the workshops was quiet reflection. After listening intently to the discussions and presentations, the beadworkers left the workshops for the long and often

5 P.J.J. Botha, ‘Rethinking the Oral-written Divide in Gospel Criticism, the Jesus Traditions in the Light of Gospel Research, in *Voices 1: A Journal for Oral Studies* (1998:32), Edgard Sienaret, ed., Centre for Oral Studies, University of Natal, Durban South Africa.

dusty rides back to their huts in the hills where they reported that they “dreamt” their imaged responses to what they had heard and learned.

Within weeks of the first HIV / AIDS intervention workshop in July 1999, the responses of the women reflected their growing understanding and interpretation of the predicament in which they found themselves. The women have “written” their telling accounts in beadwork metaphors, thus challenging many forms of silence and transforming themselves and their socio-cultural milieu.

Socio-cultural and Economic Factors—the Agents of Silence

In rural Zulu communities such as those discussed in this article, *hlonipha* is a series of politeness conventions that dictate the proper behavior, topics, and modes of discussion for women. They include the way that a young bride (*makoti*) will relate to her groom’s family. Traditionally, such behavior would include a demonstration of commitment to the new family through the execution of specific duties. These include being a lifetime partner to her husband, bearing children, and providing services to the groom’s family in the form of tasks as specialized as brewing Zulu beer (*umqombothi*),⁶ collecting water and firewood, mending thatch and scrubbing floors, and cooking and washing. In many instances, she will be restricted from going to the movies (*Angawahambi amabhayisikobho*)⁷ or visiting hotels (*Angawahambi amahhotela*).⁸ The traditional *makoti*’s demeanor also is prescribed. “[S]he will never walk across the front of the hut of her parents-in-law, ... she keeps her eyes lowered in the presence of her husband and members of his family, and is selective about the terms she uses when referring to the members of the family.”⁹ This has and is changing. “What I have observed is that the grooms’ families have changed their attitudes towards *makotis*. These days, a *makoti* can go and seek employment and be employed. The *makoti* can decide with her husband on the number of children they want. It is unlike the olden days where the parents-in-law decided on the number of children that the couple would bear.”¹⁰

More enduring is the cultural taboo that forbids the discussion of matters of personal intimacy, love, and sexuality, which often is still strictly applied. In the rural communities of KwaZulu-Natal, the anthropological imperative for the expression of matters of intimacy has resulted traditionally in beadwork as the mode of conveying the innermost feelings of love and devotion, jealousy, and pique. While knowledge is traditionally imparted primarily through the performed media of song and dance, storytelling, and proverbs, taboo topics are expressed in the mediated form of beadwork, an intricate and detailed system of fixed communication describing, communicating, and facilitating ideas of an intimate and sexual nature.

Zulu women beadworkers traditionally are regarded in their communities as opinion-makers and creative visionaries, but their role in modern Zulu society is contradictory. They primarily are sole

6 Z.H. Manqele, “Zulu Marriage, Values, and Attitudes Revealed in Song: An Oral-style Analysis of Umakoit Ungowethu as performed in the Mnambithi Region at Kwahlathi,” unpublished MA Oral-Literacy Studies Centre for Oral Studies, University of Natal, Durban, South Africa, 2000: 15.

7 Manqele, 17.

8 Manqele, 17.

9 Manqele, 16.

10 Manqele, 20.

breadwinners in their rural homes, and have earned a degree of role-model status through their expert beadwork abilities, and thus they still are regarded as opinion-makers in their communities. However, in many instances, they have been and still are simultaneously highly susceptible to HIV infection through their biological makeup, and ignorance of the virus and how they can protect themselves from infection. For the majority of the women beadworkers who have participated in the *Siyazama* Project, the workshops provided them with their first opportunity to hear of HIV/AIDS and its complexities other than via gossip and rumor.

The opportunity to learn about the HIV/AIDS virus notwithstanding, rural Zulu women are disempowered and disadvantaged by the poor educational opportunities afforded to South African black communities, particularly rural communities, during the apartheid era. The rate of literacy even in their mother tongue, Zulu, is very low. In addition, few rural Zulu women in a certain age-range would have had any viable opportunity to learn to speak English.

The *Siyazama* Project—Challenging the Silence

Housed in the Department of Graphic Design at the Durban Institute of Technology in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, the *Siyazama* Project initially was funded by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) and administered by the British Council, Durban. Expert women beadworkers from the Valley of a Thousand Hills, Inanda Valley, Msinga region, and the Ndwedwe informal settlements; undergraduate and postgraduate design students; health workers, doctors, and traditional healers; People Living with HIV/AIDS; medical anthropologists; performers and musicians; and marketing outlets work together on a multiplicity of levels. All attempt to address AIDS awareness while engendering a "breaking of the silence" and "straight talk" approach. The implicated self-informing nature of this process is neither innocent nor insignificant. An intervention such as the one described here has little chance of success unless it provides palpable and immediate evidence of significant long-term benefits to the participants.

What began in 1996 as a simple intervention to upgrade craft techniques developed of its own accord into an effective HIV/AIDS intervention. It happened because the communication mode in which the women were skilled also was the mode used traditionally and historically to circumvent the social female taboo on discussion of matters of emotional and sexual intimacy. The women used the medium of beadwork communication passed down to them by their mothers and grandmothers to express their new understanding of sexual and sex-AIDS interface insights, and their work became untra-

ditionally sexually explicit. It is suggested that the shift in beadwork design occurred spontaneously as a consequence of changing worldviews occasioned by the information provided by the HIV / AIDS workers. In turn, the designs resulting from the knowledge of HIV / AIDS then changed the women's worldview, setting up a cycle of learning that transformed both their worldview and their designs.

MAKOTI

by Fokosile Ngema of Msinga, January 2002

Story: As a married woman, the *makoti* often is highly susceptible and vulnerable to AIDS particularly if she is married polygamously or if her husband works away from home in the city.

Tableau description: The doll is 30 cms tall and is made from two long thin pieces of wood that are padded and topped with a stuffed body and head. The entire body and head are made from fabric. The doll depicted here is of a married woman identifiable by her traditional red headdress (*isicholo*). Her traditional dress with shawl show that she lives in the Msinga region of KwaZulu-Natal. Her leather skirt (*isidwaba*) is an important and highly desirable component of every married woman's wardrobe.

She wears the message "SAFA" meaning "we are suffering" beaded into her decorative apron (*isigege*). The combination and arrangement of colors are important in decoding messages. The green beads on the large white beaded fabric background could mean that, although she is contented and has achieved a degree of domestic bliss, there is an illness that is causing much discord in her life. The white beads in the traditional Zulu love letter (*ibheqe*) around her neck signify spiritual love, purity, and virginity, and the red ones stand for love and strong emotion.



Figure 2

Makoti. Created by Fokosile Ngema. Photo by Kate Wells,

© Copyright 2004 Kate Wells.

Of Polygamy—Multiple Silences

The extended family unit of multiple generations and multiple sibling families is favored for traditional, practical, and economic reasons in many indigenous communities. In many instances, polygamy is formally adopted. In such communities, a *makoti* often will welcome other *makotis* to bear the burden of the daily duties, and so a system of co-wives exists. In a community where polygamy is still practiced and accepted as a norm, fidelity within a polygamous relationship would render such an arrangement safe and reliable, but for the long term effects of apartheid legislation such as the Group Areas Act (1950) and Job Reservation (1948). The Group Areas Act resulted in the forced removal of communities, uprooting them from their traditional homes and resettling them in strange and often inhospitable environments far from sources of employment. In addition, legislated Job Reservation meant that the majority of the men of rural Zulu communities were forced to find remuneration for their labor in the gold mines of the Witwatersrand, a full day's journey by road/rail transport from their homes in the hills of KwaZulu-Natal.

In many instances, the *makoti*, or *makotis*, live with their husband's family while he lives and works in the city. Such arrangements mean that the men spent the year away from home returning only once a year, usually at Christmas, bringing with them money earned and saved to pay for new clothes, children's school fees, and school uniforms and books for the coming year. Under these circumstances, it is not unusual for the accepted traditional norm of rural polygamy to include a co-wife at a distance in the city. Such relationships with women in the city were and are notoriously unreliable for both partners because they are not anchored in the tradition of a settled community. Consequently, such relationships are less stable than their rural counterparts. Men add to or change their sexual partners in a far more random way than the tradition in the rural community would allow. Because of such instability, many urban women engaged in relationships with partners from a rural community hedge their bets by finding additional partners to provide for them. Consequently, city co-wives often are engaged in multiple migrant worker relationships in order to support their children. Such a fluid scenario of sexual interaction provides the HIV/AIDS virus a medium conducive to its optimal propagation. Engaging in conjugal relations with a husband who has spent the better part of the year on the mines in a far-off city could be a death warrant for a rural wife and any baby thus conceived.

UNSAFE SEX

by Gabi Gabi Nzama of Ndwedwe, August 1999

Story: The man knows that he has AIDS, and has not told his partner. He is not practicing safe sex since he is not using a condom, and thus is wittingly infecting her with AIDS.

Tableau description: The tableau measures 16x10 cms. The wooden base is covered with firmly stretched and hand-sewn, black cotton fabric. The two figures, both anatomically well-formed from tightly wound strips of cloth, have tight fitting waist bands comprised of red, black, and white beads. Their arms and legs encircle each other, and are covered in multicolored linear stranded loops of the smallest glass beads. Both figures have formed faces depicting eyes and mouth.

Values that are assigned to bead colors are grouped into positive and negative alternatives, except for white which has no negative connotation.¹¹ The predominant bead colors used in this tableau are red, black and white. An interpretation of the symbolic encoding and meaning of the tableau's bead colors could be the following positive message: Marriage, commitment, and regeneration of the relationship is wanted—black beads. There is much physical love and strong emotion in this relationship—red beads. The white beads signify spiritual love, purity (single partners), and virginity.

The sexual explicitness of the tableau is most extraordinary. The sexual act is profoundly depicted with genitalia fully illustrated. The image is a realistic representation of full intra-uterine penetration, but it is anything but clinical. It expresses the passion, joy, and ecstasy of human lovemaking, and in so doing highlights the paradox that the expression of human caring and pleasure simultaneously creates a predicament in an AIDS-infected world.

11 S. Schoeman, "Eloquent Beads: The Semantics of a ZULU Art Form" in *Africa Insight* 13: 2 (1983).



Figure 3
Unsafe Sex. Created by Gabi Gabi Nzama.
Photo by Kate Wells,
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THE COFFIN STORY

by Celani Njoyeza of Ndwedwe, December 2002

Story: The young woman beautifully attired for the return of her beloved husband from the mines in the north of the country, sits dejectedly alongside his coffin. Every year she awaits his return with keen anticipation for he will bring gifts from the brightly-lit city for her and the children, and money for the family's needs. Now she must bury him and wonder whether she too has AIDS, and how soon it will be before their children are orphaned.

Tableau description: The tableau measures 21x11 cms. The female figure sits with her arms extended as if not knowing what to do. The coffin alongside her is covered with a long strip of multicolored, beaded fabric in the "daisy chain" stitch pattern. Stranded loops of linear beads adorn the coffin identifying the regional Ndwedwe stitch pattern. Her body is made from tightly bound rolls of fabric. Beadwork fabric encircles her arms and legs. These beaded rectangles can be worn either as armbands (*izingusha*) or around the ankles as leggings (*amadavathi*). If taken in the negative context, the use of black and white beads on the armbands mean that there is much sorrow, despair and death in this woman's life, yet there is still hope for spiritual love and purity.

Figure 4

The Coffin Story. Created by Celani Njoyeza.

Photo by Kate Wells,

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AIDS ORPHANS

by Bonangani Ximba of Msinga, January 2002

Story: In Bonangani's words, this tableau depicts the growing numbers of AIDS orphans in her community.

Tableau description: The tableau measures 35x11 cms. Its long wooden base is covered with black cotton fabric. Each colorfully beaded child figure is made from tightly bound rolls of cloth which are then cut with a very sharp knife to form the base. Each head is made from a small bundle of cloth covered and pulled tight to make a ball shape. This then is stitched onto the body. Each orphan figure has human hair embedded into its head. The AIDS red ribbon logo is designed with superb accuracy to fit into the circular beaded loops of the body. Every second loop of each beaded circle is hand stitched into place. The arms are made from rolls of fabric and beaded intermittently with short broken lines.

The predominance of red, black, and white beads make for a powerful combination of meaning. Red beads, in their positive sense, stand for physical love and strong emotion and, in their negative sense, for anger, heartache, and impatience. The text reads: "*izitan-dane ngenxaye hiv*" meaning children who are orphaned by AIDS.

AIDS Orphans—Innocent Victims of Silence

Children orphaned by AIDS are an increasingly common phenomenon in the AIDS-ridden communities of South Africa, and KwaZulu-Natal is no exception. The questions which hang ominously over the children's innocent heads are numerous, demanding, and uncompromising. First considerations for a community are questions of how many of the children are HIV positive and how many will reach adulthood. Who will nurse and care for those whose lives will

Figure 5

AIDS Created by Bonangani Ximba.

Photo by Kate Wells,

© Copyright 2004 Kate Wells.



be brief and disease ridden? Who will ensure that they receive the medication that they deserve and need? Who will feed them, clothe them, and pay for their school fees and books? Who will perform their rituals for them so that they grow to be fully accepted and recognized members of the Zulu culture and community? Who can afford to take on the extra responsibility and cost of extra mouths to feed and bodies to clothe? Given the extent of the pandemic, can the government afford to take on this enormous responsibility?

Community grandmothers and mothers are caring for these children as best they can with their limited incomes, but the burden on the grandparents and the children themselves is horrific. That this level of life and death is already a reality in the rural communities is being written in the beadwork messages of the Siyazama workers, presenting viewers with a personal challenge that demands a response.

RAPE

by Gabi Gabi Nzama of Ndwedwe, August 2002

Story: The young virgin seeks help from the traditional diviner (*sangoma*) for an ailment. The *sangoma* treats the young woman by violently raping her.

Tableau description: The tableau measures 25x 9 cms. It is covered in an animal print velvet fabric which in turn is embellished with white beads in the shape of the AIDS ribbon, indicating that the young female is a virgin. The male figure looms over the female figure, and his penis is inserted as he pins her to the ground. Their screaming open mouths are beaded in red beads, and white bead circles make up their eyes. His hair is embellished with blue beads showing ill feelings and hostility.

Figure 6

Rape Created by Gabi Gabi Nzama.

Photo by Kate Wells,

© Copyright 2004 Kate Wells.



Rape—Shameful Silence

Rape statistics in South Africa are alarming, and the transmission of HIV / AIDS as a result of such violence is well documented. In addition, the erroneous belief that engaging in sexual intercourse with a virgin will cure HIV / AIDS is prevalent. This is prompting many men to have forced sex with young girls.

VIRGINITY TESTING

by Beauty Ndlovu of Ndwedwe, July 1999

Story: Mothers are checking girls to see if they are still virgins. They realize that, in a rural community, if you are a virgin you are safe from AIDS.

Tableau description: The tableau measures 20x11 cms. The figures are made from rolls of fabric, covered, and then dressed up appropriately. The young girl is depicted lying on the ground between her mother, anxious to know the outcome of the investigation, and the tester who is on her knees poised to examine the young girl's hymen. The young girl has her legs parted, the vaginal passage marked with a red slit at the point of vaginal entry.



Figure 7

Virginity Created by Beauty Ndlovu.

Photo by Kate Wells,

© Copyright 2004 Kate Wells.

Virginity Testing—Cheating the Silence

Significantly, the response to the HIV / AIDS information campaign has extended beyond a consciousness of the results of the pandemic, into wider responses from the community. Consciousness of the sexual transmission of the virus and the incidence of rape in the community has triggered a return to the traditional mode of preserving virginity in the Zulu community.

Virginity is highly prized among the Zulu. Traditionally, the loss of the virginity of a girl within the community is not merely a matter of shame for the girl and her family, but for the whole community. Virgin testing is carried out by women of various ages who themselves have been tested for their virginity prior to marriage. If the young woman is shown to be a virgin, the women performing the test ululate with pleasure. Conversely, the women wail, so that the outcome of the test is made public. In literate communities, a certificate will be issued. Such tests are conducted regularly and frequently on young women and girls as young as eight years of age, because public virginity testing in a community also is regarded as a rape or sexual harassment deterrent.¹² The recent resurgence of virginity testing in a significantly large sector of the Zulu community not only addresses the threat of HIV / AIDS, but also has resuscitated traditional values and attitudes, and encouraged pride and re-identification as Zulus. This last is a factor of critical importance in communities that are rendered silent and invisible by their lack of schooling, scribal literacy, and understanding of English.

Virginity consciousness was highlighted in the *Siyazama* Project by the regular inclusion of the performance of Shembe Virgins at workshops. The Shembe Virgins are a group of young people, both men and women, who have pledged to remain celibate until marriage. Followers of Isaiah Shembe number many hundreds of thousands, and constitute an indigenous church of significant influence in KwaZulu-Natal.

12 N. N. Khuzwayo, "Characteristics, Modification and Motivations for Virgin-testing Among the Zulus in the Maphumulo District of KwaZulu-Natal between 1950-2000" Unpublished MA dissertation (Durban: University of Natal, 2000).

HUMAN TOWER

by Beauty Ndlovu of Ndwedwe, August 2002

Story: The young wife, positioned at the top of the human tower, has just learned that her husband is HIV positive. On hearing this, she ran back to her community, who as her sisters, her aunts, and her mothers, protected her by pushing her up to the top of the human tower, out of the reach of her husband. Her fear is that she knows he is out looking for her. How long can she hide?

Tableau description: The tableau measures 26x30 cms. It is firmly covered with black fabric and beaded intermittently with no. 1 and no. 3 size beads. Three small animals are included in this tableau, circling and protecting the human tower. The animals are constructed from inner wire cores which then are padded with fabric before being fully beaded. Seven women stand on the bottom tier of the tower with their arms linked. Their bodies are made from tight fabric rolls, and their arms are strengthened with wire. Four women stand upon their shoulders. They, in turn, support the single figure at the top of the tower.

Figure 8

The Human Tower Created by Beauty Ndlovu.
Photo by Kate Wells,
© Copyright 2004 Kate Wells.



The Human Tower—the Silence Is Broken

It is about four years since the inception of the HIV / AIDS intervention workshops in July 1999, which began the process of informing the beadworkers of the *Siyazama* project about HIV / AIDS. The women now are better informed and financially better off than at any time in the past. Yet, ironically, they find themselves still faced with a predicament over which they have limited control. Knowledge and financial empowerment are not sufficient to make the necessary lifesaving choices and changes easy and immediate. Other factors impinge: the most intractable are the traditional gender roles and dynamics in their communities. This intractability notwithstanding, the beadworkers are in the process of changing their subservient and compliant roles, as well as the expectations and perceptions of others.

They report that they feel that their culture has been “pushed” and that they have tested the boundaries of what is considered to be acceptable behavior for women: they have challenged and are challenging *hlonipha*. At a recent public workshop focused on the beadwork messages of the *Siyazama* project, when asked what she considered her role to be, Fokisile Ngema (65 years old) responded to the Zulu male interviewer boldly and confidently. She explained her role as a sex educator using explicit sexual terms in Zulu, terms that she would not have dreamed of speaking out loud to another woman, let alone a man, as little as a year ago in deference to *hlonipha*, and which many of her Zulu sisters still would not do.

Unfortunately, most male partners still are not receptive to the new information and awareness, and reportedly at times are aggressive and abusive to the women. This immediately puts the women under further threat. They now have to find new ways of negotiating around issues of sexuality within the familial construct in which they were, and still are, extremely vulnerable to HIV / AIDS because of polygamous practices. Leaving the marital arrangement seldom is a viable solution, because they often are the sole rural income generators providing for their extended households. *Ubuntu*, the Zulu sense of community responsibility binds them fast.¹³

The ironies of this cruel and paradoxical predicament are not lost on the women. These days when it becomes known in the community that a man is sexually active outside of marriage, whether monogamous or polygamous, he is regarded as potentially HIV positive. In such circumstances, *ubuntu* once more prevails and the women of the community will provide the kind of support emotionally and physically that will place a woman beyond the influence of the man’s persuasion and force. Ultimately and often, this is the only protection that the women of the rural communities of KwaZulu-Natal can rely upon.

13 Yvonne Winters, personal communication, 2001.

Conclusion

This article demonstrates the operation of beadwork as a reliable means for the authoritative communication of messages that have a direct and critical impact on the livelihoods and lives of people disempowered, silenced, and rendered invisible by multiple hegemonies. Faced with the pandemic of HIV / AIDS, restricted by cultural taboos, limited by a lack of scribal writing, and with no command of English, the Zulu women of rural KwaZulu-Natal have developed a code and mode of metaphoric messaging that transmits the ironies of their life-threatening predicament powerfully. Through beadwork, they have addressed a multiplicity of silences and effected socio-cultural transformation, thus quite literally changing themselves and the world in which they live. This has been achieved both qualitatively and quantitatively. Their output has been prodigious. To date, the *Siyazama* collection numbers two hundred and forty individual examples of the visual metaphoric messages with which this group of Zulu women of rural KwaZulu-Natal are challenging the silences that have disempowered them and which threaten their existence and survival.

“Siyazama... we are striving to make a positive difference”

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Glossary of Zulu Terms

Abathakathi: medical magic or witchcraft

Amadavathi: leggings

Amadlozi: The ancestors—those who have passed from the present state of consciousness to that following this. The Zulu people do not think of death as an end, but as living in another state of consciousness.

Amatonga: ancestral worship

Hlonipha: a mode of expression/behavior denoting respect for males and their families

Ibique: a Zulu “love letter” of beadfabric carrying a message of intimacy from a woman to a man

Inyanga: a herbalist, usually male with a comprehensive knowledge of traditional medicine ground from leaves, bark, stems, bulbs, fruits, flowers, seeds and animal parts. Scarification is also employed and is seen as analogous to vaccinations. Izinyanga (plural) are highly trained over an intense lifetime period graduating from novice to expert over a long period of time. (personal communique, Dube)

Ishoba: a brush made from animal tail hair held in the left hand of the sangoma

Isicholo: traditional red headdress of a married Zulu woman

Isidwaba: leather skirt worn by a married Zulu woman

Isigege: a decorative apron

Izingusha: armbands

Nkulchu: a chicken

Kuyasa: the sun is rising in the morning

Kwa: in the place of

Makoti: a Zulu bride or daughter-in-law

Mame or **mamekazi:** the aunts of the mother

Malume: the mother’s brother who takes the place of a “male mother” (uncle)

Muthi: a remedy

Sangoma: is usually a female called upon to become a sangoma by the ancestors, who bestow upon her clairvoyant diagnostic powers. Isangoma also throw bones to read into a patient’s problems. The bones are thrown randomly onto a skin during the consultation period and a message is received after intense concentration. Isangoma spend many years in training, eventually graduating from novice to expert, (personal communique, Dube)

Siyazama: literally means “we are trying,” but is taken to indicate that “we are making a positive difference”

Ubuntu: humanism and a sense of mutual care and support, and pride in the past and in the African renaissance

Umzulu: traditional Zulu cosmology. This Zulu religious system, although influenced by Christian missionaries, adheres to a complex belief system.

Unkulunkulu: God, or the first man—the “Greatest of the Great”—who involved himself in the Tradition of Creation and matters of life and death

Zulu: a little piece of heaven