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Selling with the San: Representations of Bushman People and Artefacts in South African Print Advertisements

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This paper examines the use of visual images of the Bushman peoples (San) and their cultural objects in contemporary South African advertising. As an image is a site of meaning, the relationship between the people represented in the advertisement and the culture for which the advertisement is produced demonstrates strategies of subjection and power. Within the context of the advertisement, I explore the extent to which San people are appropriated by the consumer society and their ritual objects reduced or altered to a Western aesthetic dimension. The contexts and ideas of the producing society determine production of the visual object.

The relationship between the San "artefact" and the advertisement as a work of "art" reflects a dimension of South African social and political processes. Representations of the two juxtaposed societies suggest that the value systems and cultural attitudes of the dominant group present contested domains which are explored. Bushmen represent a malleable signifier which is used to promote an apparently/ostensibly applied vision of an emerging non-racial country.

At the outset I need to address the issue of the use of the terminology: Bushman or San? The people who form part of the subject matter of this paper belong to what is generally called the Khoisan group of Africans; the Khoikhoi and the San or Bushmen. *San* is the word used by the Nama Khoikoi people for all Bushman groups. According to current academic usage, the terms "Khoisan" or "San" are generally acceptable. "However," as Megan Biesele explains, "in the Namibian context the word 'San' has derogatory connotations for the Bushman" [Biesele 1990: last page]. Lewis-Williams and Dowson [1989:9] elaborate that the Nama applied *San* to any impoverished, cattleless people. I generally use "Bushmen," as it is currently acceptable, and not specifically insulting. However, I do not use it comfortably, for two specific reasons. First, the name comes from the seventeenth century Dutch, *Boeschjesmans*, which is therefore culturally and

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politically loaded with sexist and racist connotations. These connotations have been passed down, together with the term, through the passage of time. The use of "Bushman" reflects an age-old (Western) partiality; that of the male-centered world which denies or at least obscures the presence of women! Woman is silently excluded. Secondly, the people themselves do not have one all-encompassing word to describe themselves. Different groups from different areas each have specific names for themselves; for example, a group from Namibia and northern Botswana who refer to themselves as *Zu/'hoasi* which means "completed people," are called the *!Kung* by anthropologists. Currently, the people's choice seems to vary with, for example, some groups in the Cape choosing *San*, and some in Botswana choosing *B'sawa* [Prof. Badenhorst, pers. comm. 1994]. The terminology "San" or "Bushman" is therefore an imposition and a construct.

This paper, which presents an art historian's perspective, aims to examine recent South African print advertisements in which Bushmen and their cultural artefacts are employed and depicted. It examines the relationship between the people represented in the ads, the Bushmen, and the culture for which the advertisements were produced. This relationship demonstrates strategies of subjection and power as the visual images become part of the techniques intrinsic to the exercise of power. Analysis of power needs to be promoted by two questions, the first of which asks about the means of exerting power and the second which queries the effects of that exercise of power. In a way the images help create the mechanisms of power as they assume an economic, political and social function on behalf of the dominant group. Visual images, reflecting their producing society, create a site for the formation of further knowledge. The advertisements expose a mythological vision of a pristine ethnicity which reveals an almost universally accepted discourse which determines the way Bushman people are viewed by others. This receiving culture is a multicultural, yet strongly Western, consumer-oriented culture.

Many of the advertisements show a utopian concept of an age-old nomadic people living completely in tune with and secure in their environment. The land of the hunter-gatherers becomes an observed symbolic space, quite separate from that of the viewing, consumer society. David Bunn in a paper entitled "Displacements," suggests that "[w]hat is being offered, and sought, in South Africa, is a landscape as a sort of commodity, a transactable item that may be circulated in a particular regime of value ..." [Bunn 1992:7]. "For at least 1,000 years Bushman peoples have co-existed with Iron Age pastoralists and cultivators in Namibia, and have experienced varying degrees of acculturation and assimilation; since contact with white peoples their fate has been extermination or dispossession of their land and virtual enslavement" [Marshall and Ritchie 1994:82]. The supreme irony of the image of contented nomads revolves around the fact that the few remaining Bushmen are no longer wanderers, as they have in this century been systematically deprived of their land.

In addition to the issues of power and land, several of the advertisements attempt to depict people frozen in time. This is exemplified in the photograph and caption, in a *National Geographic* article, of a couple of Dzu Bushmen of the Tsodilo Hills who were paid to take off their clothes and instructed to "look fierce and not smile for the camera," whilst at the same time pretending to stalk a French television crew's helicopter [Lee 1990: 50–51]. Television commercials, documentaries and films as diverse as Jamie Uys's internationally successful *The Gods Must be Crazy* [1980][1] and Paul Myburgh's *People of the Great Sandface* [1985][2] have all contributed in one way or another to perpetuating a fantasy about the Bushman. In addition, as Keyan Tomaselli asserts, "[m]any appropriations of San art, the people and white myths ... about them, have been motivated by cynical commercialism" [Tomaselli 1993: 81].

The advertisements (hereinafter, ads) I will discuss and analyze need to be understood in the particular socio-political context in which they were produced and disseminated. These ads were made in the late 1980s and early 1990s, beginning with the period of secret high level negotiations and then after February 2, 1990, the start of official dismantling of apartheid. They reflect a largely new concern of much of the white elite to recognize and even celebrate South Africa's African context. Intrinsic to this project was an increasing lack of comfort with, and perhaps even rejection of apartheid,[3] and its associated vision of racial separation, and European identification for whites. The organizations for which the majority of the advertisements were made were South African Airways (SAA), Spoornet (a division of South African Railways), and the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). Being state and parastatal organizations they in particular presumably felt the need to separate themselves from their apartheid "past." In this context, the Bushmen were used to symbolize these new sensibilities.

Bushmen offer at least four symbolic advantages to the advertiser. Firstly, at least to the average viewer and consumer, Bushmen are largely uncontested and uncontroversial symbols of blackness and Africanness. Zulus, for example, were frequently used in the nineteenth century to represent Africa or black people to British and other audiences. In addition the Zulu have strong claims to the land, whereas Bushmen, a politically negated people, are not strongly identified with specific land claims. But today, by contrast, "Zulu" means different things to different people, and at a symbolic level is likely to inspire emotion and strong opinion rather than be an easily manipulated signifier available for the ad agency's uses. "Bushmen" connotes Africa, and "Bushmen" connotes black people, without being encumbered by negative or controversial political and symbolic meanings.

Secondly, and closely related to this point, Bushmen are not seen to be associated with any of the actors and parties in South Africa's fraught socio-political terrain. The Bushmen are considered by many to be distinct and removed from the day-to-day conflicts that engulf South Africa. As

such, they allow a viewer to embrace the idea of being part of black Africa and multiracial South Africa, without making the audience and consumer identify with groups like the then United Democratic Front (UDF), the African National Congress (ANC), or the Inkatha Freedom Front. The Bushmen thus become available for nation (or company) building, and myth-making.

Thirdly, the Bushmen evoke, in a manner reminiscent of Laurens van der Post [1957, 1962], a utopian and idyllic past, untouched by apartheid, development and industrialization. The world represented by SABC's communication, Spoornet's railways and SAA's aeroplanes is not seen to be a threat to the Bushmen, and indeed is seen to be able to build on the Bushmen's heritage and foundations. Thus South Africa can move from the Edenic world of the Bushmen, where blackness, Africa, the environment and indigenous people are unthreatened, to a multicultural, part-Western part-African post-apartheid culture where all the population share common roots in Africa.

Fourthly, although not specifically located in South Africa, Bushmen, a marginalized and liminal group, are thus used to suggest a whole nation, and companies that aspire to serve and represent a united country in touch with its African identity know this. They symbolize blackness, and yet are seen to be different from the other black people and organizations that populate the sociopolitical terrain. They are not white, and yet provide a bridge between whites and Africanness by the white claim to identify them, and identify with them. Thus Bushmen epitomize the liminal state which is, as Anne Norton notes, a bridge and border between the new and the old.

> Liminality is a threshold state "betwixt and between" existing orders. Liminars, whether their rites of passage are ritual or revolutionary, are between identities. In politics, they are between allegiances. This state is marked by ambiguity, ambivalence, and contradiction, yet it is from this disorder that new orders arise. In reflecting on the differences that mark out the liminal, people have given meaning to their nationalities [Norton 1988: 53].

> Liminars serve as mirrors for nations. At once other and like, they provide the occasion for the nation to constitute itself in reflection upon its identity. Their likeness permits contemplation and recognition, their difference the abstraction of those ideal traits that will henceforth define the nation [Norton 1988: 54].

The very absence of Bushmen from daily discourses and experience thus makes them available as symbols and metaphors to encode and recode the new. That they are not threatening is particularly important when one realizes that the advertisements are aimed at an elite as much as, if not more so than, at a mass audience. While the ads appeared in mass media, from billboards to newspapers like *The Star*, they were also specifically targeted at predominantly white, moneyed opinion-makers through the pages of *The Financial Mail* or *Leadership* magazines. In the case of the SABC, the images of Bushmen and their art appear on desk calendars, distributed to all six thousand staff members and a mailing list of seventeen thousand

South Africans. As such, the role of Bushmen in these advertisements may thus be seen to be aimed at altering a white elite mindset, with a view to establishing broader multiracial or even nonracial and multicultural organizations, businesses, and sociopolitical institutions. This will hopefully become clearer and be further underscored in my discussion of the images. This discussion of the images will in turn allow me to make some broader theoretical comments about the relationship between advertising and the broad strategies of subjection and power.

One would think that the use of Bushman artefacts for advertisements need not necessarily be contentious, especially when advertising is synonymous with information directly related to San culture. The following two images exemplify a so-called "appropriate" use of the Bushman image as the visual image supplements the textual particulars. The poster which poses the question, "16 Museums within 3 kms?" [Figure 1], uses African and Bushman artefacts, among others, to identify the main scope of each museum. Clearly one of the producer's intentions was to stimulate an interest in the multidisciplinary activities of the University of Witwatersrand's museums, and therefore the contents of some of the museums are displayed to stimulate the viewers' curiosity or interest. Some observers might find the eclectic array of objects disconcerting, whilst others might note a metonymous use of the ostrich egg to denote "Bushman," which will feature again in other advertisements, a somewhat perplexing symbol.

The painted image of a mythical creature placed on the poster produced by the Rock Art Research Unit [Figure 2] of the University of the Witwatersrand is equally germane. This poster was used by the Unit, among other purposes, outside the gallery during an exhibition held early in 1994 at the University of the Witwatersrand. It states, clearly and unequivocally, two fundamental issues vis-à-vis the Rock Art Unit's position on rock painting. First, it states their opinion that painted images on rocks relate to "[t]he great theme of Bushman art [which] is the power of animals to sustain and transform human life by affording access to otherwise unattainable spiritual dimensions" [Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1989: preface]. Secondly, it asserts that rock art is Africa's oldest artistic tradition.

In contrast a small plastic flip-over desk calendar was produced for the SABC in 1992 and distributed on a complimentary basis by the Corporation's publicity department [Figure 3]. One of the pages of this Afrikaans and English language[4] calendar is devoted to a statement of the SABC's vision and "shared values." As it is unclear with whom these values are shared it invites questions with regard to unstated assumptions the SABC seem to hold about South Africans and their value systems. "Respect for the individual", "Positive South Africanism", and "Concern for man and his environment" are amongst the eight "values" listed which could possibly link with the decision to take as their annual theme a selection from a "collection of some 30,000" of Bert Woodhouse's slides of rock paintings.

Figure 1. 16 Museums within 3 kms, University of the Witwatersrand.

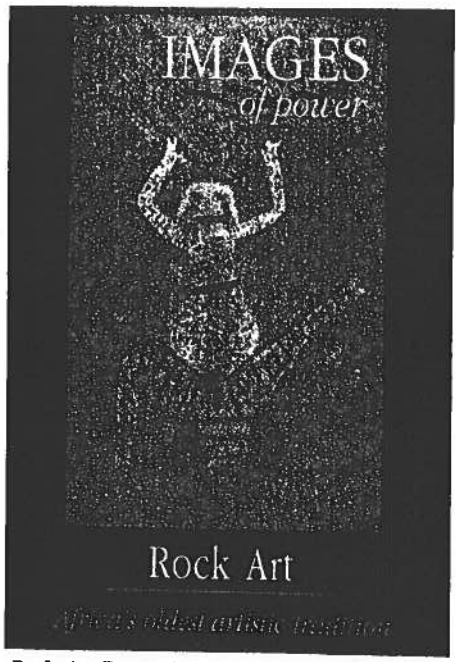

Figure 2. Rock Art Research Unit, University of the Witwatersrand.

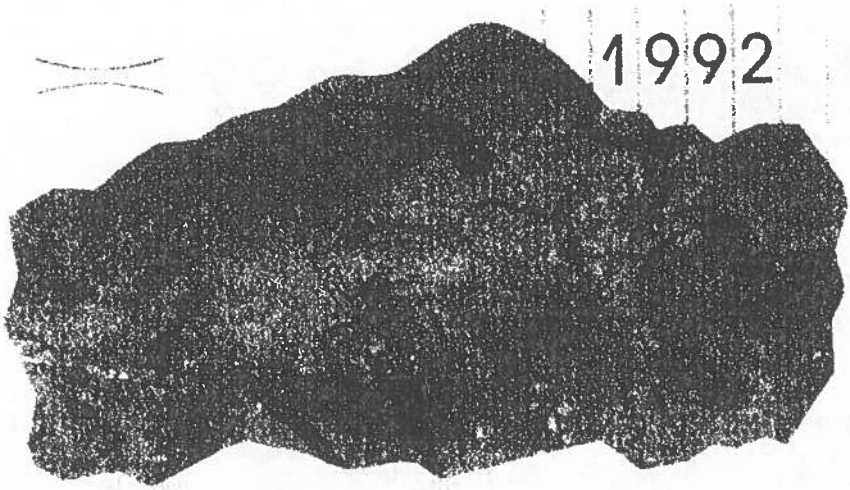

Figure 3. Front page image of SABC calendar, South African Broadcasting Corporation, 1992.

This latter information is supplied with a short description about South Africa being "one of the world's richest sources of rock art" and the way in which "Bushman artists recorded their way of life, the animals they hunted, and the creatures of their mythology." The authoritative tones of Woodhouse's captions present themselves as uncontested factual information.

The rest of the calendar follows a month-a-page format, each of which features a reproduction of a different Bushman-painted image. Most retain a near naturalistic rock coloring like the representations depicting Mountain Reedbuck [Figure 4]. The representation of the section of rock face is arbitrarily truncated to fit the aesthetic design of the general composition, and more especially, to show a comprehensible narrative within the rock painting, to match the caption below. Some of the basic rock colors are somewhat suspect, for example the rather bright blue for February [Figure 5]. This caption, like the others on each, is brief and authoritative. It states "Paintings of birds are rare. This one probably symbolizes the Bushman belief that the wind was a bird". However, this is misleading as, in light of the scholarship that was available in 1992, to refer to the enigmatic mythological creatures as "birds" is to do the significance of the paintings and the complex belief system of the Bushmen a grave injustice. If in fact the SABC aspires to achieve "Excellence in all we do", another of their shared values, they have failed to reflect accurately the possible depth of meaning, even in a brief way suitable for mass consumption, that lies within the Bushman imagery.

The last five examples show how even if the Bushman-made artefact or

Figure 4. Mountain Reedbuck, South African Broadcasting Corporation, 1992.

image is placed in a situation seemingly appropriate to its use, this use can raise other issues.[5] The debate around the location of such work within the museum or gallery context is not really an issue in this regard as the appearance of the image on the poster could invite the interested party into the museum and thus enable her or him to engage with the presentation.

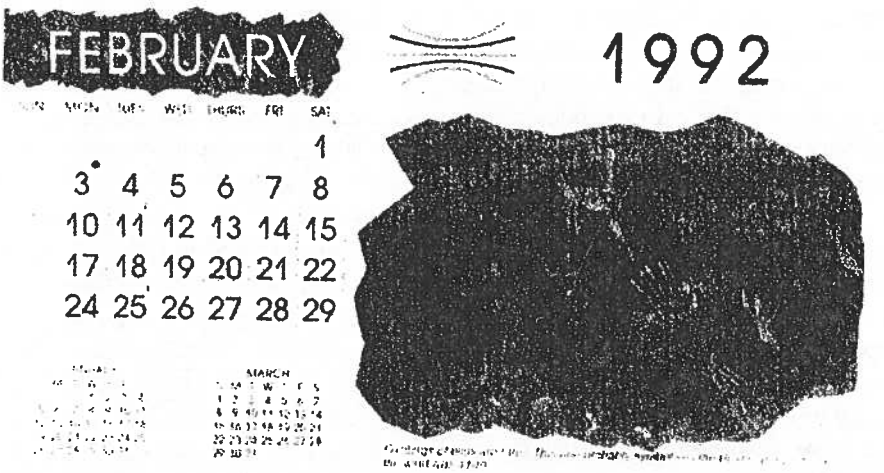

Figure 5. Page for February, South African Broadcasting Corporation, 1992.

More problematic is the text which accompanies the various images, as the short, decisive statements do not invite any questioning from the average spectator; they are invariably accepted as an unassailed "truth". Consequently the commanding tone of the Rock Art Unit does not, for example, invite any discussion as to whether or not these painted representations fall within accepted Western notions of art. Similarly, the seemingly definitive words of the SABC texts are responsible for entrenching in people's minds simplistic messages about the possible meanings of Bushman ritual.

A range of images using Bushman people and their artefacts was produced for Spoornet during 1992. The advertising campaign which included television and print advertisements had its roots in the newly privatised company and its name change. The new business required a new corporate image and wanted to send out the message that they "would deliver on time." Their brief was for a corporate commercial that was "warm and would make people aware of what the railways is about" [Van den Burg 1993: pers. comm.]. The ad agency's creative team, under the leadership of Louis van den Burg, devised a series that would be "unique to Africa" and would provide "beautiful images that create warmth and empathy with the public" [Van den Burg 1993: pers. comm.]. They wanted to "show a train without a train" and decided upon the project whereby they would "let the Bushman tell the story about the train in Africa" [Van den Burg 1993: pers. comm.]. Van den Burg explained further that they did not want to use words to convey that concept but relied upon the visual to imply "train" [Van den Burg 1993: pers. comm.]. It is clear that they utilized the notion that mobility is fundamental for survival, and therefore affects most aspects of Bushman life [Marshall and Ritchie 1984: 74].

The agency have taken the Bushman people who exist in South Africa as a subordinated social, racial and cultural group and elevated them symbolically and visually, decontextualising them from a twentieth century reality [Figure 6]. The Bushmen have been elevated on a symbolic, pictorial and romantic level which was vastly different from their current experience. The team relied heavily on the notion of an ancient nomadic people who, through force of circumstances beyond their own control, are no longer nomads. There is no acknowledgment of dispossession from their land and the radical way in which their traditional lifestyle has altered.[6] Instead, set within the Western tradition of the sublime and picturesque where the harsh African landscape is poetically shown, they are presented as part of a vision of a popular symbolic space.

Several of the Spoornet advertisements utilize the South African fine art tradition of, and interest in, the genre of landscape. The central image of this ad [Figure 6] is the symbolic presentation and use of space, which includes the spatialization of the "train" of people, as they wind their way within the flat landscape. A smooth, open and unending desert is suggested by high viewpoint, and reinforced by the frame of magnified grains

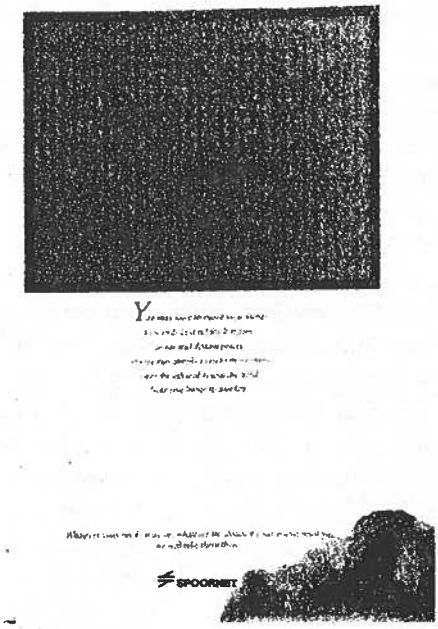

Figure 6. ... Worlds beyond the horizon ..., Spoornet advertisement, 1992.

of sand. J. M. Coetzee recalls a "dream topography" of Africa in which he describes a popular vision of

> South Africa as a vast, empty, silent space, older than man, older than the dinosaurs whose bones lie bedded in its rocks, and destined to be vast, empty, and unchanged long after man as passed from its face. Under such a conception of Africa—"Africa, oldest of the continents"—the task of the human imagination is to conceive not a social order capable of domesticating the landscape, but any kind of relation at all that consciousness can have with it [Coetzee 1988: 7].

If, as Coetzee suggests, that landscape "remains alien, impenetrable, until a language is found in which to win it, speak it, represent it" [Coetzee 1988: 7], then the agency claims would be that they have the answer to the way in which it can be "won" by being able to traverse it. The ad suggests that the authentic African way is first the Bushman way and then, secondly, the Spoornet way. By placing their message that they will deliver goods from near or far, next to the cozy domestic scene of the family next to their dwelling in the bottom right corner, Spoornet intimates that the long journey across the alien desertscape leads to the safety and security of home. The ad follows an established convention which shows that the conclusion of the expedition has led to a safe arrival home.

The harshness of the hostile landscape is depicted in this image ("Just fall in line. 1", Figure 7) where the silhouetted horizontal line of the Bushman band is thrown in sharp contrast against the gentle rosy colored sky. The agency has employed the picturesque technique which juxtaposes the rugged texture of the rocks against the soft orange-pink sky. The sun and sky appear to be deliberately ambiguous as another convention is brought into play. The suggested mood could either be associated with ideas of hope and optimism if sunrise is implied; or if sunset, it would link with the previous image and suggest the band's proximity to the safe conclusion of their journey. Significantly, as Berger asserts, images made for purposes of advertising or publicity, "[n]ever speak of the present. Often they refer to the past and always they speak of the future" [Berger 1986: 130]. The use of cliché demonstrates the fact that as much as ad agencies are in the forefront of forming attitudes they have to rely very heavily on clichés, and readily assessed imagery; in this example, the appeal of a gentle sunscape ("Just fall in line. 2," Figure 8). There is a strong feeling of progression as the viewpoint moves from the long shot of the first Spoornet ad, through to this close-up of the band traversing the rocky, hostile landscape of the Kalahari desert. Applicable to others in the series, but particularly to this one, this kind of image nourishes an already established idea of what David Bunn calls "a South African picturesque" when he cites the words of "the eccen-

Figure 7. Just fall in line. 1, Spoornet advertisement, 1992.

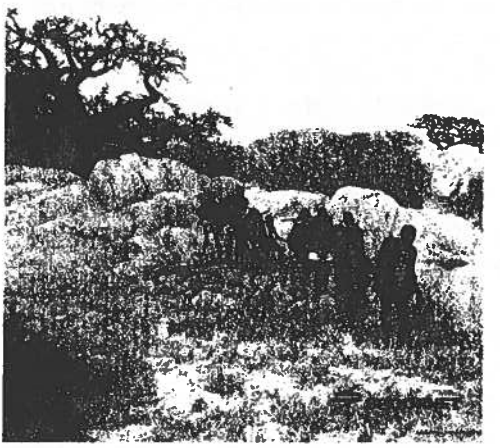

Figure 8. Just fall in line. 2, Spoornet advertisement, 1992.

tric ... early nineteenth century traveller", Cowper Rose who writes about "the hushed and might solitudes of savage scenery, where all is motionless" [Bunn 1992: 6]. The convention and ideas about the savage landscape which have become embedded in popular consciousness could easily and simultaneously be transferred to the line of people as well. As Preziosi suggests: "Visual environments orchestrate signification, deploy and stage relations of power, and construct and embody ideologies through the establishment of frameworks of legibility. Such frameworks incorporate and fabricate cues as to how they are to be reckoned with by individual subjects and groups" [Preziosi 1989: 169].

The three other ads in the Spoornet print campaign deal more specifically with close-ups of the people from an immutable past. The image of the man dancing [Figure 9] which the Lindsay Smithers team created for their romantic image of "the Bushmen and their way of life" in a far-off place, presents a very different image from the contrived situation, noted earlier, in which a French film crew filmed Dzu Bushmen living in the Tsolido Hills. Consequently, it is difficult not to be very cynical about the possibly posed attitude of the dancer. More disquieting, however, is the subtle juxtaposition of the man and the three, anthropomorphized meerkats in a standing

Figure 9. Man dancing, Spoornet advertisement, 1992.

Figure 10. A time for sharing, Spoornet advertisement, 1992.

position, which contrast preys on more than two centuries of racial bias and prejudice that conjoined Bushmen with the animals.

The transcendent qualities of "A Time for Sharing" [Figure 10] focus on a traditional way of life. They tell of the Bushman people's special knowledge of their environment and the manner in which they can not only traverse the land, but survive to maintain the traditional family values most societies espouse. This message was considered to be particularly appropriate at Christmas-time, and interestingly echoes the SABC's "shared values" philosophy. The tone of this and the small vignettes of "hearth and home" in the other ads reflect the creative team's response to their brief "to be warm". Images like these interweave myths of place and persons as they show "original people in the original environment." The ad creates a mythical idealised record of the past whilst trying to give meaning to the present. The sensitive fingers cradling the precious fragile ostrich egg seem to suggest that the egg is an item of hidden treasure emerging from the kaross [Figure 11]. A similar technique was used for the eggs in the SAA ad, which protrude from the sand like half-buried treasure, awaiting discovery [Figure 12].

The framing technique and the whole style of photography and layout used in the majority of the Spoornet ads lend them a Eurocentric cultural authority which can be likened to Western notions about the allure of authenticity which is associated with the original work of art. Allusion to this concept is overtly stated in the set of ads, produced by the same agency, for South African Airways. The notion is repeated in both image and text. The catch phrase, "It took an African airline to elevate flying to a high art," was used for a range of images that used both traditional African cultural objects and contemporary objects as works of art. Text is an interesting aspect of this series of ads. Situated below the image, the first two sentences read:

> It took a nomadic African tribe six thousand years to take the splendours of a continent and turn them into an art form. But it took an African airline less than fifty years to go from nothing to being voted 'The Best Airline to Africa' for the fourth year running by readers of the UK's prestigious "Executive Travel" magazine.[7]

Placed below this picture of authentic Bushman bow, quiver and arrows and the eggs, on one level the text seems appropriate as it speaks of "a nomadic tribe." There are, however, two associated problems. The first is that in this case the ad agency manipulated the artefact, by etching their symbols on the ostrich egg shell. It was not the so-called "nomadic tribe" who made the "art form." Secondly the same test is used for several ads in the series. One example features an array of containers [Figure 13], again with contemporary designs specially made for SAA. These do not represent the "art forms" of a "nomadic tribe", but are more likely to be representative of the work of rural agro-pastoralists. So once again there is a

Figure 11. Valuable goods, Spoornet advertisement, 1992.

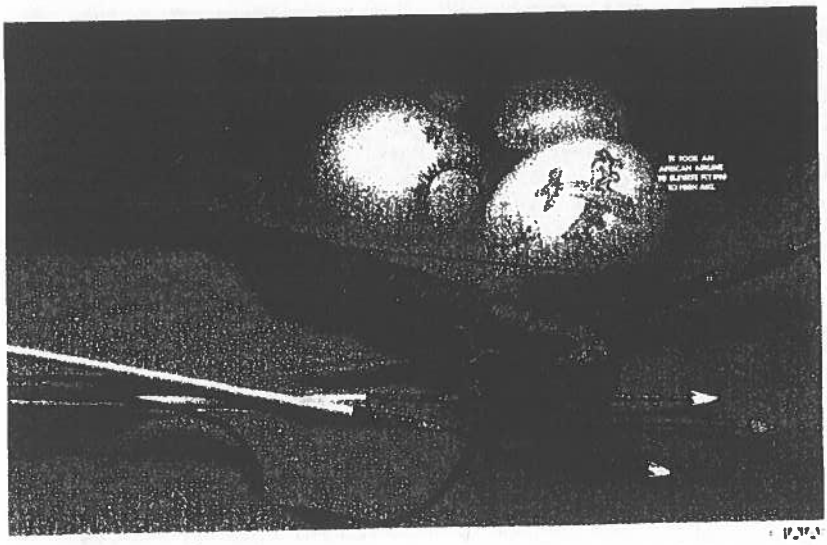

Figure 12. Hidden treasure, South African Airways advertisement, 1991.

romanticizing and mythologizing of African people and their objects producing what Varnedoe and Gopnick call "... the unmistakable vocabulary of advertising, the great shaper of consciousness and fabricator of myth in the Western notions of our century" [Varnedoe and Gopnik 1991: 231].

The final image of "Mowana Lodge" [Figure 14] is also a deliberate agency construction of a so-called Bushman painted rock, which also utilizes known stylistic conventions of Bushman painting. However, the central image among five in the full page layout is acknowledged in the tiniest of print to be a "Rock painting represented, not authentic". To the uninformed, however, it has pretensions to authenticity. It has been made to add weight to the construction of a somewhat confused myth surrounding the Mowana Lodge. The whole ad shows a mixture of misconceptions and fantasies which revolve around an idyllic, mythical vision of Africa and African people. I quote from the text: "As its ethnic Setswana name suggests, Mowana—the place of the baobab—has been around for quite some time. Over 1000 years in fact ...". The rock and its forms (clearly the inclusion of landscape features and other elements would indicate to the informed viewer that this is a construct), coupled with the text, are part of the construction of the myth that draws on the image of the ancient hunter-gatherer people to attract people to the "atmosphere that's steeped in the traditions of the wild" at the Mowana Lodge. The inaccuracies, inconsistencies and fanciful transformations on the rock support the status quo of the old myth of the Dark Continent. They become part of the universally

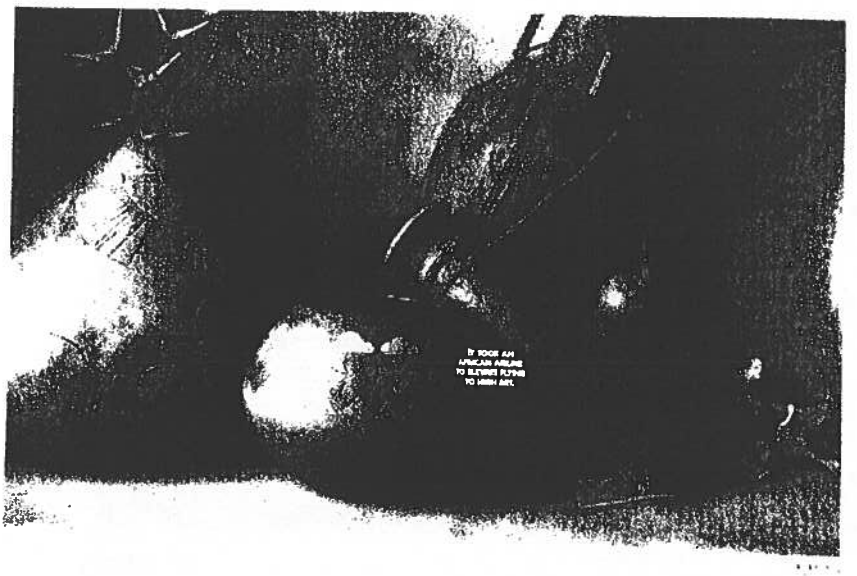

Figure 13. Vessels as artefacts, South African Airways advertisement, 1991.

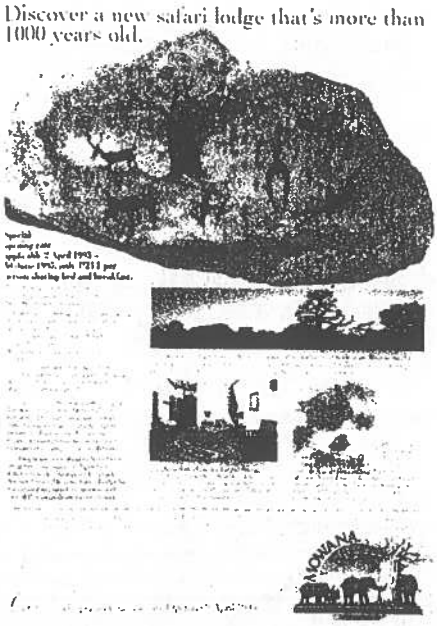

Figure 14. Mowana Lodge advertisement, Botswana, 1992.

accepted discourse which determines the way in which one group of people see another.

Like all visual images, advertisements are replete with both implicit and explicit meaning. Advertising images, as representations of both their producing and receiving society, are part of systems of cultural signification. As constructs of an ideology, they in turn serve as cultural indicators and are part of complex political and social processes. The popular notion of the Bushman people and their material culture, which are popularly seen as one, is a conflation of common ideas. This construct encompasses a view which has been built into a by now established, Western vision of the Bushman people. Representations of Bushmen show them as if they were a timeless, changeless people whose traditional culture and way of life have remained little altered from an eighteenth century perspective. The result is a neat composite that conflates a prehistoric, historic and contemporary people, which view itself demonstrates an historical partiality and specificity. In his *Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa in the Years 1797 and 1798*, John Barrow describes the Bushman as follows:

In his disposition he is lively and chearful; in his person active. His talents are far above mediocrity; and averse to idleness, they are seldom without employment ... (the Bushmen) sometimes dance on moonlight nights from the setting to the rising of the sun .... The small circular trodden places around their huts indicated their fondness for this amusement. His

chearfulness is the more extraordinary, as the morsel he procures to support existence is earned with danger and fatigue [Barrow, cited by Pratt 1985: 119].

Compare this with a few excerpts from a glossy 1992 publication for popular consumption:

The Bushmen ... have learned to act together for the continued existence of the group, for without harmony and co-operation, the group would disintegrate ... Hut making is essentially a merry task, usually carried out by both men and women .... [a]lthough men are the great hunters, Bushmen women are the basic providers for the band .... Armed with digging sticks, skin bags and large hides fashioned into karosses for bringing home the day's pickings, ... the women set off on gathering expeditions, chatting and singing as they go in what is a rather jolly occasion [Struik Publishers 1992; no pagination].

These two extracts published almost two hundred years apart from one another show how racial and cultural stereotyping allows for simplistic categorization. Boonzaier and Sharp suggest:

'Cultures' or 'ethnic groups' ... continue to provide fertile terrain for the perpetuation of many of the underlying notions associated with the race paradigm. Like 'race', 'culture' can be used as a unit to classify people and thus rank them in some hierarchical order. And when 'cultures' are viewed as relatively static, bounded and homogeneous entities, or when ethnic groups are seen as simply fixed populations carrying around such permanent cultural 'luggage', the idea of 'inherited culture' is reinforced rather than challenged [Boonzaier and Sharp 1988: 67].

Ironically, even those who have been the strongest supporters of the Bushmen are partly responsible for creating this attitude; for example, Dorothea Bleek wrote of the Nharo who "would beg shamelessly ... like the children they are" [Barnard 1995 cites Bleek 1985: 109]. Elizabeth Marshall Thomas wrote of "The Harmless People" [1959], and the person who possibly had the greatest influence on the formation of popular ideas, Laurens van der Post, wrote of the "purity" of the vanishing First People of Africa [1962].

Whilst advertising using images of Bushmen purports to be respectful of Bushman culture and society, cultural objects are sometimes adapted and modified to suit the needs of contemporary advertisers. To be generous, perhaps this sort of construction is undertaken out of ignorance. But as Bushman rock painting is part of an intricate ritual and belief system, this only serves to endorse the opinion that knowledge of Bushman people is scant and superficial. The adaptations and alterations produce a somewhat contradictory tactic which results in the way in which a so-called empathetic approach to the Bushman is contrasted with the insensitive manner in which belief systems are trivialized.

Although this paper aims to avoid an analysis of the methods and workings of advertising agencies, it is pertinent to note that there is a strong interface between the thought systems of the creative team and the public for whom they produce the ad. The team is not demographically, or in any other way, fully representative of the public. They do try, nevertheless, to think as the public, and more specifically to understand the perspective of their target market. Beliefs and trends are therefore reflected in advertise-

ments. However, advertising, which makes images for sale or to promote selling, is what Varnedoe and Gopnik call an "overlord" culture, directed by a few people toward a broad audience [Varnedoe and Gopnik 1991: 16]. Therefore, in the same way that the subject matter, the Bushman, is seen as a fixed and unchangeable group, the makers of ads constitute their targeted viewers as a unified subject or group.

The production of an ad is not spontaneous; it is carefully contrived and is self-conscious. Yet despite that, not all the aspects are consciously intended constructions: they reflect the values, norms or set of beliefs of either the briefing agent or the producers of the ad. They may also reflect what the producer considers the public needs or desires. That means the needs of the seller, the producer and the consumer have to be considered. Their mutual roles and even interdependence are rooted in a set of socially determined codes that are a part of twentieth century consumer society. The ads can be seen as agents and/or artefacts of culture reflecting a shared set of norms and values.[8]

The most important criterion of a successful ad is whether it results in increased sales or meets the goal for which it was intended. This is not, however, the only measurement of success. The images and messages have an effect on the broad public as well as the target market. The advertiser's images are part of an established visual language of signs that transmits ideas. Like ideas encoded in traditional art forms, ideas inherent in the image are the beliefs, images and values of the dominant producing society, which reflects not only the ad agency but the hegemonic class they represent. They could be said to be the agents of a culture as they indicate attitudes and they reflect its norms and values. Complex systems of thought frame the world view of the producers. The image which is itself a site of meaning signifies relations of power. The images as conscious constructs made by an ad agency are not self contained, but are on the contrary inextricably bound up with a variety of practices of the whole social group who produced them and for whom they are produced.

The production of advertising images arises out of the dominant, consumer (capitalist) society who could be said to be the "voiced." Consequently the "silenced" Bushman people remain subjected, being expropriated and exploited: a cultural and social "other." The set of images using a Bushman theme is generally directed to a specific level of the consumer society. Given the historical period of production, the late 1980s and early 1990s, this group could be said to be a target market within the ruling class. They constitute part of the economic, ideological and socio-political grouping who have the ability to persuade members of their own group and other classes to view the world in a manner that is favorable to their own ascendancy. The modes and methods of domination are diffuse and complex and are generally concealed forms of control. Advertising is one of those subtle, even hidden, mechanisms of ideological influence and control. The modes and ways of the thinking and actions of the dominant

group are not static, so it is necessary to note that these ads reflect a general perception and overarching approach of a particular segment of South African society. This was not a deliberate program of the apartheid machine, and should not to be confused with blatant propaganda, but is a more insidious imposition of influence and control.

James Scott asserts that "the greater the disparity in power between dominant and subordinate and the more arbitrarily it is exercised, the more the public transcript of subordinates will take on a stereotyped, ritualistic cast" [Scott 1990: 3]. The hidden transcript, which I suggest is implicit in the carefully constructed ad, is characterized by "discourse that takes place "offstage," beyond direct observation by powerholders" [Scott 1990: 4]. In this case, the consumer public who are ultimately a vital part of the hegemonic group are the powerholders who support and allow to be entrenched the systems of power-relations. Scott gives an important reminder: "Power relations are not, alas, so straightforward that we can call what is said in power-laden contexts false, and what is said offstage true" [Scott 1990: 5]. If this is so, then it is necessary to acknowledge the importance of different levels of meaning that exist in the advertisement.

Although there is a popular assumption that the ad represents a "truth," I have argued that it reflects a subjective perspective. It is constructed with a clear aim in mind and uses social formations which one must consider are often partial and the construction of which is also rooted in certain prejudices. Ads do not represent a homogeneous society, nor even fairly reflect a society's stance.

The Spoornet set of ads creates a tension wherein the legitimate right of the Bushmen to their land is subtly suggested, but at the same time this type of representation perpetuates a dream, a false illusion far removed from any reality. Stereotypes made over decades, even centuries, reinforce and reproduce themselves and consequently lead to oppression and racism. The values they propagate, whilst appearing to be harmless and benign, circle through the cultural system endlessly and become ideological constructs in themselves.

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NOTES

1. This film was "an international blockbuster and became one of the highest grossing films of all time in Japan, France, and Canada while in constant distribution in Sweden years after its release" [Tomaselli 1989: 45–46].

2. Myburgh, an anthropologist, lived for 22 months in the bush and single-handedly recorded "The final year in the traditional life of the last free-living !Gwikwe Bushmen of the central Kalahari Desert of Botswana, before they followed others to a government settlement ..." [Tomaselli 1992: 153]. Responses to this film were very mixed and often made it highly controversial. See Gordon [1990] and Tomaselli *et al.* [1992].
3. The various and often imprecise usages of the term "apartheid" by individuals, companies and sectors within business are almost a case study in the differing and changing nature of the term. We have concluded that in popular usage "apartheid" has six main meanings, which in reality may be found along a continuum of social discourse [Lee and Buntman 1989: 117–19].
4. These two languages were then the two official languages in South Africa.
5. The placement of images and artefacts in museums raises a series of questions and issues. These are, however, beyond the scope of this paper.
6. The story in Namibia is depressingly familiar: the powerless are not consulted and their existence becomes ever more marginal as decisions are taken by outsiders with other interests [Marshall and Ritchie 1984: v].
7. Given the political circumstances prevailing at the time of production of the ad, it should be remembered that this period would have been during the time of punitive sanctions against South Africa when a very limited number of international airlines flew to South Africa and SAA had limited access to other countries within Africa.
8. Traditionally it could have been said that "safe" ads would invariably avoid reflecting topical issues, but in the 1990s that has been changing with the issue-based, socially responsible style of advertising highlighted by, for example, "Benetton." That type of work is not under discussion here.

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