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Shifting Beauties:
White Women's Aesthetics and the Post-Apartheid Erosion of Segregated Spaces in Johannesburg, S.A.

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SIGNATURE PAGE AND DECLARATION

I, MELISSA DEAN declare that the work contained herein consists solely of my own original work and is being submitted for a Master's degree in Anthropology at the University of the Witwatersrand.

Date: Monday February 16th, 2009
Name: Melissa Joan Dean
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Signature: _____

Giant, warm, blustery, billowy, bright-coloured thank-yous to:

Mpume for his patience and for watching soccer with the volume off so I could write.
My super-chic advisor Pamila for being positive and encouraging every time I wanted to give up and flee to Siberia in disgrace.
S. Nuttal and Suzanne for generously sharing resources.
Jah for guidance and protection in Babylon.
All of the women who helped me with this research by meeting with me for discussions over good coffee and florentines.
All my ferrets at home in ferredise; had it not been for your constant sustaining love beaming across the wires and miles I would absolutely not have stayed to see this through.

Dedicated to everyone who is working to embrace a defiant notion of female beauty that is based on life-affirming bodies, unshackled creativity, and exuberant fabulousness.

Beauty is found in the realization that there is unity in our differences.

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Glossary of Terms

Aesthetics - Relating to beauty and attractiveness, including facial features, body, make-up, clothing and other adornment.

African – A person who traces their ethnic ancestry to Africa.

Afro-centric – (Also Africentric)Any idea, outlook, lifestyle, approach, symbol, or ideology that orients itself through a positive embracing of Black culture, community, aesthetics, art forms or history.

Apartheid – The National Party's government policy of the separation of the races in South Africa from 1948 to 1994

apartheid - separateness

Black-associated fashion – Fashion or accessories that incorporate symbolic aspects of Black (African) culture (aesthetics, politics, history, etc.) or are infused with cultural associations with Black people.

Black - I use "Black" as a visual or rather as an *aesthetic* distinction, but one with cultural associations. When I am referring to a person of African decent in a way devoid of ethnic or cultural connotations I will use a lowercase "b" – black.

CBD - Central Business District

Culturally Coloured – As a visual category: people who appear to be of "mixed race" but embrace a distinctly non Black African aesthetic. As a cultural distinction: people in South Africa of mixed race who identify with Afrikaans culture and language.

Ethnically Ambiguous, E.A. – People of "mixed race" who possess physical features that defy racial or ethnic classification or who could simultaneously visually fit into numerous ethnic groups. (LaFerla, 2003)

Lessthanwhite - Also: borderline white, marginal white, ethnic white, white trash, not-quite-white. "Lessthanwhite" is a term I borrow, with respect, from Inga Muscio's *Autobiography of a Blue-Eyed Devil: My Life and Times in a Racist, Imperialist Society* (2005) where the term is explained as an ethnic insult which could be levelled at anyone who is not a (male) (middle-class) White Anglo-Saxon Protestant, including people often otherwise categorized as White (e.g. Southern Europeans, Eastern Europeans, poor Whites, Jewish people, etc.).

Morethanwhite – I also borrow this term from Inga Muscio who suggested that because people "of Colour" are defined as having something White people *lack* (melanin) they should be referred to as "*more*thanwhite" rather than "lessthanwhite".

People of Colour - All people who are not visually distinguishable as "White", including people who may be actually light or lighter skinned than many Western Europeans (e.g. Japanese). This term is visually inaccurate because it is an ethnic rather than a racial term. I use this term because it was formed to combat the derogatory term "non-White", and it is considered respectful at this time.

Race Jamming – Based on the idea of culture jamming, a global, anti-capitalism based anarchist movement to de-commercialize public space and in general break the power advertising holds on society by creatively playing with and parodying the seductive messages in advertisements. I co-opted this idea and applied it to race. To race jam then is to challenge the power and boundedness of racial distinctions by playing with their meanings. see Lasn Kalle (1999) and Naomi Klein (2000) for elaboration on culture jamming.
Rainbow Nation - "Rainbow Nation" is a term coined by Archbishop Desmond Tutu and elaborated on by then new President of South Africa Nelson Mandela to describe the vision of a peaceful ethnic co-existance of post-apartheid South Africa.

Sportie – (sp?) A fedora-like hat, considered masculine township fashion.

White - People who appear to be of European descent ("Caucasian") but a category that holds both physical and cultural connotations. When I am referring to a person of European decent in a way devoid of ethnic or cultural connotations I will use a lowercase "w" – white.

White supremacist racism - The set of ideologies that suggest that Caucasian people (those who trace their ancestry to north-western Europe and are light in complexion) are a physically, intellectually and/or spiritually superior group of humans; the practices of prejudice and discrimination associated with said ideologies. As distinct from other types of racism which may seem to operate outside of notions of White supremacy e.g. East Indian racism against Africans in Dar es Salaam, Mandarin racism against certain minority ethnic groups in China (but are nonetheless often impacted by colonial relations and notions of an ethnic hierarchy of lightness).

White Normativity – The perception of White physical features, habits and culture as normal, unremarkable, invisible or prototypically human as a result of living as a White person in a White environment. Could theoretically be valueless (difference does not inherently denote value) but is often associated with White supremacist racism.

INTRODUCTION

Finding the Black in Whiteness: Turning the Gaze Inside Out

Returning from my morning class, I skirted the cafeteria, full, as usual, with watchful, assessing eyes. I was too tired for the visual interrogation that day. Instead, I took the quiet path leading behind Hall Five. I liked it because it was lined with those giant weeping trees that grow strangely downwards from limb into root, like recent immigrants asserting themselves into the soil (why could I not be like them, just put down roots and claim autochthony?). Further up the path I saw that group of girls from Hall Five. They were resplendent in their tightly tailored skirt-sets of brightly patterned batiks and kitienge[1] *cloth. I quickly assessed my outfit: pink and red, bright; at least it matched. It would have to do. Then I saw them seeing me. They fell silent, waiting, openly watching as I approached, their faces offering nothing. I was just trying to decide where to put my eyes when I suddenly recalled a story that a male friend had told several years before. After an evening of observing the madness of the six-woman household in which I lived, he wryly informed us of a natural phenomenon wherein flocks of rooks will land and gather into circles called parliaments. Eventually, one of the birds will enter the centre of the circle and begin to perform a dance. If her performance is accepted, the parliament is dissolved and the birds fly away together. If her performance is somehow unpleasing, the parliament will close in on the performer and collectively peck her to death. After I passed the group of women, my unreturned greeting a small misery in my mouth, they broke into loud chatter and I wondered briefly if this was a slow death by pecking. I walked quickly, my eyes fixed on the ground in front of my feet so that I would not trip on the uneven, broken path stones erupting helter-skelter out of the ground, or fall into one of the many miscellaneous holes. Finally in the thankful privacy of my room, I peeled off my sweat soaked clothes and, wrapping myself in a*

[1] East African patterned cloth

kikoi,[2] *I padded barefoot down the hall to the bathroom to splash water on my face. For the first time in months, I leaned in close and scrutinized my reflection in the browning, flecked surface of the mirror. I recoiled, staring at myself in alarm. What was wrong with my face? My nose! My lips! Why was everything so narrow and pinched? Was I sick? I peered at myself from this way and that. Was that even me? When did I become so ugly? And then my confused dismay turned gradually to wonder as it slowly dawned on me exactly what was wrong with my face. What was wrong with my face was that I was not Black.*

This story describes an incident that occurred in 2004 during my initial ten-month stay as a Canadian exchange student at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. As one of perhaps twenty-five White female students on a campus of several thousand, I was an extremely visible minority. After eight months of existing in a visual human environment comprised almost solely of Black African people, I had subconsciously come to view my own "White " features as "ugly' or at the very least "odd" – out of place. In a social environment where I was visually identifiable as an ethnic minority and hence an *outsider*, I came to feel shackled to my Whiteness. Wherever I went, to the market, to town, local men would often greet me "Mambo Mzungu!" ("Hi white person!"), and local women would often not greet me at all. The constant feeling that I was under surveillance and evaluation – particularly by the other female students on campus - put me in a state of nervous self-awareness that I would not shake for months after leaving the country. For the first time I was inescapably Othered. In retrospect, I recognized that in my attempts to appeal to local aesthetic sensibilities (dress, adornment, etc.), I was actually engaging in attempts to downplay my *embodied* Whiteness and enhance those features that might be categorized as "African". Far from the more ethnically diverse (yet still predominantly White) environment of home, I felt like a daisy in a field of poppies. Rather than being simply an abstract ideological construct, an aesthetic ideal, or a

[2] A women's striped woven wrap originating from Kenya.

state of privilege, my Whiteness seemed an inescapable roadblock to being normal, unremarkable, human.

This experience set me on a path to thinking about racialized notions of feminine beauty, and how power relations (class, gender) and environmental factors not only influence the construction of such notions, but also how we as women perceive and engage with (i.e. accept, reject, rework, internalize, transform, recreate) them. How do we know what is beautiful? Where is "race" located in this knowledge? If the ideological power of Whiteness is partially rooted in its invisibility and normativity (e.g. bell hooks, 1992; Vron Ware, 1992; Ruth Frankenberg, 1992; Richard Dyer, 1997; John Hartigan Jr., 1997; Daniel Bernardi, 1998; Uli Linke, 1999), what happens when Whiteness becomes visible – not just in academic discourse, but in everyday life? And how might it change relations of power between White people and people of Colour when the gaze that assesses and informs is no longer solely a White gaze?

When I returned to Africa several years later - this time to Johannesburg, South Africa - these same ideas resurfaced. I began to wonder why is it that there has been so much written about the assimilative effects of White aesthetic culture on women of Colour, but there appears to be next to no studies about the influence of the Other on White women. Is it that women of Colour *have* no influence, that people are failing to see it, or that no one is writing about it? Despite all the labouring within Whiteness Studies over the past decade is White still invisible yet central, unexamined yet normative? And when we write about beauty, whose gaze(s) are reflected in our words? Whose eyes are we looking through, and is there anyone looking back at us? These musings eventually led me to pursue research concerning the aesthetic relationships between White and Black women in the unique context of post-apartheid Johannesburg, the largest and most troubled city in this fledgling Rainbow Nation.

Since the official end of Apartheid in 1994 there has been a proliferation of anthropological research on contemporary urban South Africa, with a particular focus on the city of Johannesburg. However, few of these works have given explicit attention to identities and experiences of *Whiteness* in the "new" South Africa. In particular, studies focusing on the racialized experiences of White *women* are largely absent from the anthropological literature[3]. This trend may be a reflection of the understandable trepidation with which many people approach discussion of "race" within the fragile co-existence that characterizes the "new" South Africa. It may also reflect an anxiety that to study constructions of Whiteness might appear to perpetuate a White supremacist focus, or conversely might reveal the actual presence of such a focus (Ahmed 2002). A focus on the more pressing issues of crime and poverty, HIV/AIDS and politicized historical events (i.e. the anti-apartheid struggle) functions as an alternative to an uneasy engagement with persistent racialized cultural patterns. That is to say that while an examination of Whiteness could call attention to institutionalized White privilege, it also potentially challenges current political discourses that promote South Africa as a "non-racial" "Rainbow Nation" (MacDonald 2006). As uncomfortable as it may be, I suggest that to not talk about Whiteness in this country is to conceal the persistent relationship between classed, racialized, and gendered identities and consequently to frustrate change.

The first thirteen years of a democratic South Africa have seen intense changes in the economic, structural and human environments of Johannesburg. These changes have in turn altered the nature of inter-ethnic contact and relations. The repealing of Apartheid laws that controlled the free movement of Black people in urban areas and that enforced inferior ("Bantu") education, as well as the implementation of ANC economic policies, specifically B.E.E. (Black Economic

[3] This is not to suggest that there is no literature focusing on White women in post-apartheid South Africa, but rather that the majority of texts I have encountered are biographical, autobiographical, or fiction and often focus on famous women, particularly women "in the struggle" such as Ruth First or Nadine Gordimer, rather than focusing on Whiteness as an analytical category.

Empowerment) have facilitated the rapid growth of the Black middle class in Johannesburg. In turn, this has allowed for the movement of Black people into formerly White urban spaces in general, and elite White social spaces in particular. This integration represents an altering of economic relations, but also *visual* relations. Of particular interest to me was locating women within these changes.

As more salient carriers of both class and ethnic identities than men, women's lives can function as barometers of cultural change (Ortner, 2006; R. Frankenberg 1993). If "White women are, by definition, practitioners of White culture" (R. Frankenberg, 1993: 228), changes in cultural meanings of Whiteness are likely to manifest more explicitly in women than in men.[4] Women's identities and by extension, social "value" are often powerfully tied to their physical appearance (Kaw, 1993; Frost, 1999; Bordo, 1993; Thesander, 1997; Jacobs-Huey, 2004) in ways that men's are not, and so cultural changes can be evaluated to some extent *visually,* as they manifest on and through women's bodies.[5] That said, many works that have addressed women's aesthetics in relation to "race" tend to focus on the power of a normative White female aesthetic to (traumatically) impose itself onto the female "Other" while it itself remains unseen, unexamined, and *unchanged by* the interaction (E. Kaw, 1993; D. Sekayi, 2003; Rosado, 2003; N. Ribane, 2006; b. hooks, 1992; M. Lovejoy, 2001; E. Newman-Phillips, 2004). I set out in my research to reverse that analytical gaze. In this thesis I investigate increased social and visual contact between middle class White women and middle class Black people – women in particular - in present day Johannesburg and how this contact may be influencing White women's notions of female beauty, adornment (fashion), and attractiveness.

Under the umbrella idea of the reversal of the gaze, this thesis focuses on three gendered themes: 1) The constructed and visual environment in Johannesburg (an

[4] Or are more likely to be spearheaded by women themselves. Women are often active agents in these processes, not simply passive mediums.
[5] Through grooming, clothing, and adornment as well as through body shape and size - all of these infused with culturally determined meanings and value.

ethnographic analysis of space and place); 2) Constructions of White female identity (Whiteness as a relational category to Blackness); and 3) The commodification of ethnicity (ethnography of consumption and taste). Under Apartheid, the power of Whiteness was not reinforced and maintained solely through the *ideological* normativity of Whiteness, but through a structuring of inter-ethnic contact, a control of the visual environment, and through controlling and invalidating the gaze of Black people and removing their power *to articulate* what they saw (Ribane 2006; hooks 1992; Magubane 2004). Throughout this work I focus on four (distinct but interrelated) avenues of power through which Black culture and aesthetics may be influencing White women's aesthetics in contemporary Johannesburg. They are: visual presence (challenging normative White aesthetics), market influence (Black economic clout impacting fashion/beauty industries), political empowerment (power to look back, to *see*), and Afro-centricity ("rejections" of Whiteness through an embracing of Blackness).

I have chosen to focus solely on the relationship between Black and White at the exclusion of other ethnicities in this thesis not because I wish to perpetuate the limiting trend of positing "race" in terms of these opposites, but because historical, demographic, political, and economic factors make the Black/White relationships particularly aesthetically significant in post-Apartheid Johannesburg. Within this context, Black women have been historically and in some cases continue to be, placed at the bottom of a White supremacist economic, cultural, and aesthetic hierarchy. This has resulted in an enduring conceptualization of Black and White as antithetical categories. While White women certainly have had contact with Indian, East Asian, and culturally Coloured women (among many other Others), according to the Apartheid racial hierarchy, these women were not considered *as* "different" from White women as Black women. In Johannesburg in particular, they were also more *distant*, rendering a comparison less relevant. Consequently, the dismantling of Apartheid has arguably had less impact on these relationships. Partially because

Black women have traditionally worked as nannies and domestics in the homes of White women (occupations less frequently filled by women of other ethnicities), Black women are the ethnic "Other" with which White women have had the most frequent, enduring, and intimate contact. Black women are also the most numerous female Other, comprising approximately 80% of the female population in Johannesburg (Mid-Year Census Estimates 2007, Stats SA).

Since 1994, poor Black women have become more numerous in urban areas. But I would argue that the nature of their contact with White women – as nannies and domestics or in service jobs – has remained largely unchanged, as has their aesthetic significance. It is upwardly mobile – that is middle-class - Black people, women in particular,[6] who have begun to visually integrate White women's social spaces in a new and aesthetically meaningful way. I argue that this is altering relationships of power and creating the potential for entirely new sorts of interaction between Black and White – that is, one of equals. It is partially this increasing inability of White women to move in exclusively White *social* environments that I wish to evaluate in this thesis. I have chosen to focus on ethnic integration of middle class/elite social and cultural space because it is here that I locate the most significant changes and processes of interethnic influence.

One of the environments that I identify as being most significant to these new interactions is the suburban shopping mall. In post-apartheid Johannesburg, the popularity of mega shopping centres can be related to White Flight from the city centre. Fear of violent crime, structural changes to city streets and buildings, and an increased desire to control one's (racialized) human environment have infused shopping malls in Johannesburg with a heightened local significance and cultural meaning. This, in addition to the aforementioned distinction of women as carriers of class, the explicitly economic dimensions of Apartheid (and therefore of subsequent integration), and the feminine gendering of consumption (Nixon 1992; Reekie 1992)

[6] Who are increasingly becoming the face of B.E.E

established the mall as a place where racialized, class-based, and gender identities converge. The local significance of the mall (a place of safety and escape), the mall as a gendered consumer space (a place women go to shop) and the mall as an explicitly visually oriented and orienting environment (a place where people go to see *and be seen*) made a shopping mall the logical choice for my primary field site. I chose the Rosebank Mall/The Zone[7] in Rosebank in particular because it is an up-market mall in an elite area yet has a predominantly Black clientele, houses high-end Afro-centric shops and Black-associated fashion labels, and is considered the "artsy" mall where "it" young people, up and comers in the arts scene, and local celebrities hang out.

The ethnographic data that shapes these discussions was gathered over a twelve-month period spent in Johannesburg in 2007. It represents three months of intensive field site observations, in-depth interviews, an engagement with local visual media, and many other daily conversations, observations, and experiences. The voices of White women in Johannesburg are directly represented in this thesis by a focus group of ten young middle-class White women with whom I conducted in-depth interviews. Because my focus is post-Apartheid change, my focus group consisted of women who came of age (spent their teenaged years) in a post-apartheid Johannesburg. Their ideas and opinions are sometimes generationally contextualized through comparative surveys completed by both they and their mothers, who grew up under Apartheid in a very different Johannesburg. The voices of these women and data I created based on their contributions are interspersed throughout this thesis.

In what follows I will provide a structural guide to this thesis by introducing a brief outline of each chapter. I have chosen to begin with a chapter on methodology, *Making it Plain*, which introduces my guiding methodologies and research design. In it, I briefly describe my data collection methods and how data will be analyzed and applied in this work. I also detail how I created certain categories of meaning and

[7] The Mall of Rosebank and The Zone are two malls within the same shopping complex. For the purposes of my research I treat them as parts of the same entity and for brevity's sake refer to that combined mall as the Rosebank Mall.

explain my use, adoption, rejection, and alteration of certain terms. This chapter will include short sections which offer additional information on my fieldwork experience, focus group selection, and the ethical considerations involved in carrying out this research. I attempt to situate my particular identity and self within this work throughout this chapter. In order to provide insight into the individual contexts of the young White women who comprised my focus group, I have included a section at the end of the methodology chapter that introduces and provides some biographical information on each of them.

Chapter two, *Walls and Malls: Putting Race in its Place?* describes changes in the human visual environment in post-apartheid Johannesburg as it is connected to changes in the built environment and the racialized locating of people around the city. The purposes of this chapter are to contextualize these changes, and in doing so, to establish the particular local importance of the shopping mall as my primary field site. In this chapter I focus primarily on the trends of "new urban segregation" and the erosion of public space. In particular, I am guided by Marc Augè's (1995) idea of the anthropological "non-place", and literature on the racialized, class based, and explicitly *structural* nature of urban (re)segregation (Petra Kruppinger, 2004; Mike Davis, 1990, 1992; Setha Low, 2003, 2006; Andrè Czeglédy, 2004; Tereasa Caldeira, 2001, 2005; James Holston, 2005; Michael Sorkin, 1992; Marc Augè, 1995). I focus on three structural manifestations of urban segregation: the omnipresence of security walls, public transportation and the changing significance of the shopping mall. I argue that far from being solely divisive and alienating, these processes are actually contributing to the formation of *new* cultural spaces of meaningful inter-ethnic contact; that Johannesburg is currently undergoing *simultaneous* processes of ethnic integration and (re)segregation.

Chapters three and four, *Seeing in Black and White* and *Mediating Beauty* are guided by two understandings: a) that conceptions of White and Black beauty have been historically constructed in relation to and in contrast with one another, and b)

that women's identities are primarily learned, reinforced, and expressed visually. In chapter three, I use the Rosebank Mall as a space in which to evaluate the potential impact of ethnic integration on White women's aesthetic sensibilities. I focus on embodied racialized traits, specifically women's hair and body shape as the primary stereotypical markers of "race" (Thesander 1997; Hill 2002; hooks 1992b; Jacobs-Huey 2004; Kaw 1993; Ribane 2006; Rosado 2003; Sekayi 2003; Newman-Phillips 2004). My intention to "reverse the gaze" on Whiteness (which threads through this whole thesis) is first developed and applied more solidly in this chapter. I apply this approach by evaluating visual integration in a context where White women are seeing and *being seen* by Black women who are neither "under their control" (i.e. their employees) nor necessarily aesthetically dismissible (i.e. poor). In chapter four I shift from in-person contact to a look at the way elite Black women are portrayed in four "mainstream" (White-identified) women's magazines, an examination that is strongly influenced by the work of Richard Dyer (1997) on Whiteness in art and film and Uli Linke (1999) on the White body in public space.

Chapter five, *Is Class the New Race? Is Black the New black?"* I evaluate the potential cultural impact of "Black-associated"[8] fashion on mainstream (i.e. White) women's fashion in Johannesburg with a focus on those shops located at the Rosebank Mall. Central to this chapter is the idea that the symbols of culture and ethnicity can be commodities that can be purchased and "put on". In particular I compare the relative ability of (White) western commodity culture (assimilative, homogenizing, "non-ethnic") and the new commodified Blackness (particular, racialized) to function as inclusive, unifying cultural categories. I first draw on the discourse surrounding the "born-frees" to evaluate the argument that Black youth are being assimilated into a "colour blind" middle-class consumer culture – i.e. that "class is the new race" (Nuttal, 2004, Czeglèdy, 2004; Lowther, 2006). I then examine the

[8] Also referred to as Afro-centric, Afro-Chic, "Afro-Urban Wear", or "African lifestyle" brands. I amalgamate all of these distinctions under "Black-associated fashion".

growing cultural influence of Black-associated fashion for women as a form of commodified Black culture, with a particular focus on the gendered differences between men and women's Black associated fashion and the corresponding different ways White men and women may be perceiving them. I end this chapter by discussing the potential of this new, ostensibly purchasable Black middle-class culture to function as an ethnically inclusive identity. I flip the question around to ask can *Black*-associated fashion become mainstream fashion in Johannesburg? And if so, will this occur through a de-emphasis or a re-emphasis on ethnicity? Central to this examination is the tension between Whiteness as an assimilative but essentially meaningless identity (e.g. Dyer 1992; Bernardi, 1998; Hartigan, 1997; Linke 1999; Ahmed 2004; Ware 1992; Back & Ware, 2002) and Blackness as a meaningful identity (T. Morrison, 1992) that possesses the cultural capital of being associated with counter-culture resistance and "coolness" (H. Trevor-Roper 1983; M. Chapman 1995; M. Bucholtz, 1999; E. Chun, 2001; M. Bucholtz & S. Trechter, 2004; B. Kitwana, 2005; J. Tanz, 2007).

The final chapter *Identity and Belonging: Is There Room for White in the Rainbow (Nation)?* functions as a short conclusion to this thesis.

CHAPTER ONE

Methodology

"Whiteness exists without knowledge of Blackness"
bell hooks (1992:166)

Research Aims and Methodology

This chapter will examine the subjective, experiential approach used in this research in order to evidence its usefulness in illuminating my questions about the possible impacts of ethnic integration on the aesthetic sense of White women. This approach allowed me to evaluate the degree to which a focus group of young, middle-class White women in Johannesburg perceive, acknowledge, or incorporate Black aesthetic forms or symbols into their own conceptions of beauty and attractiveness, as a way of approaching the potential of "Black" to function as an ethnically inclusive identity. The overarching aim of this thesis is to challenge the centrality of White people (in the forms of both narcissism and guilt) in Whiteness studies by shifting the focus onto the powerful cultural influence that people of Colour have within "White" culture, specifically their potential roles in the dismantling of exclusionary or assimilative Whiteness and the creation of new, inclusive identities. In what follows I will outline the fieldwork and theory that forms and informs this thesis. I try to be as clear as possible about my own biases and influences on this work as I move through discussions of my research design and methods, ethics, and finally literature review.

On the Stickiness of Words

> "I believe in the recognition of devices as devices – but I also believe in the reality of those devices. In one century men choose to hide their conquests under religion, in another under race. I may recognize the fraudulence of the device in both cases, but the fact remains that a man who has a sword run through him because he will not become a Moslem or a Christian – or who is lynched in Mississippi or Zatembe because he is black – is suffering the utter reality of that device of conquest. And it is pointless to pretend that it doesn't exist – merely because it is a lie..."
>
> Tshembe, Les Blanc
> (Lorraine Hansberry, in hooks 1992:27)

Due to the sensitive nature of the topics I am approaching as well as conflicts between local understandings and language and my own worldview and corresponding terminologies, choosing the particular words to use in the research and writing of this thesis was difficult, particularly as they relate to the risk of reifying words that carry negative connotations. Where I use seemingly tired terms, such as "race", I do so because they are the terms used by the people I spoke with in Johannesburg. Perhaps I am not as concerned as I should be about this issue of word use, as I take up Sarah Ahmed's (2004) argument that race did not create racism, racism created race, and so it reasons that "race" will only disappear once racism is eliminated. These words - these problematic categories - have not changed because the realities they describe have not really changed. It has been my experience that people in Johannesburg still think and speak about ethnicity in terms of the four racial designations used under Apartheid: Black, White, Coloured, and Indian.[9] Because I am examining ethnic identities partially through the eyes and perceptions of young White women in Johannesburg, I sometimes "put on" and use their ethnic categories and terms. That said, I have attempted to establish coherent categories of meaning that can feel true to me, are locally relevant, and are clear to the reader and I have included a glossary of terms preceding the introduction to this thesis for the reader to refer to.

Establishing Categories of Analysis: Class and Ethnicity

I employed two slightly different classifications of Whiteness in my research. For the purposes of establishing a focus group of young White women with whom to conduct interviews, I classified as "White" those women *who consider themselves White* and who trace their ancestry to Europe[10]. Visually defining Whiteness during fieldwork observations proved more difficult. Are women of Middle Eastern (Arab,

[9] Thus rendering other distinct ethnic identities such as Chinese, Greek, or Muslim discursively invisible.
[10] However, the fact that I chose to approach some women and not others based on their appearance also means that my own conceptions of Whiteness influenced this stage of my research.

Persian, etc.) descent White? Are Italian women White? What about "White featured" Indian women such as blue-eyed Aishwariya Rai? In these areas of my research, I adopted local distinctions and classified as "White" those women who appeared to be of European descent *and* who would be classified as White by other White South Africans. [11]

When establishing parameters for the category of Black, I deviated somewhat from local categories of understanding. I classified as "Black" those women who appeared to be of Black African descent and who would be locally classified as Black. I *also* visually classified as Black some women who would be locally classified as *Coloured*.

In South Africa, the term Coloured is used broadly to refer to any person of ethnically "mixed" heritage[12], as was its use as a legal distinction under apartheid. However, it is also used to refer specifically to a sub-group of "Coloured" South Africans, who are associated with the Afrikaans language and culture, and who have historically occupied identifiably different geographical, social, cultural, and *aesthetic* space than Black people. Aesthetic distinctions of culturally Coloured women centred on the absence or suppression of stereotypically Black features. For example, I was frequently told (by both White-identified and Black-identified people) that *culturally* Coloured women always straighten their hair in order to masque its curliness, and they do not braid their hair as braiding is considered a "Black" aesthetic symbol. This sub-group of Coloured women were described to me as not possessing stereotypically African bodies or African body culture, and their fashion sense is perceived as being starkly different than Black women's. In the surveys, when asked to describe Coloured women's distinct style or fashion, the answer space was most frequently left blank. The few women who did attempt to fill in this section wrote comments such as

[11] For example, in Johannesburg, Italian, Greek, and Eastern Europeans are classified as White, not as "in-between people" (Back & Ware 2002:21) as in some other racial classification systems.
[12] Not unlike the terms Métis, Mulatto(a), or Mestizo(a) although less specific as to the ethnicities involved.

"not sure", "dull", "conservative", "flowery things", "no make-up", and "no sense of style". From these responses, it became apparent that the White women I surveyed seemed to largely conceive of "Coloured" as a category with little aesthetic connection to "Black".[13] Therefore, the "Coloured" women who I visually classified as Black during my fieldwork possessed some significant Black/African aesthetic markers, (most commonly curly or kinky hair, but also Afro-centric or Black-identified fashion), because this placed them in a position of symbolic association with Black culture or Black identity, regardless of their skin pigmentation.[14] Women who fit the description of *culturally* Coloured, I categorized as Coloured (an aesthetic category) thereby eliminating them from my research.

Because class is of central importance to both gendered and racialized identities, I had to employ definitive categories of class both in my field site observations and in recruiting young women for my focus group. As stated in the introduction, I chose to focus on middle-class women only. However, in a city where extravagant wealth and dehumanizing poverty exist in such close proximity, it is difficult to have perspective on distinctions such as middle class. Is middle class owning a car, or owning a summer home in the Cape? Does being wealthy mean you drive a Mercedes or your own private jet? Moreover, is "poor" in Sandton also "poor" in Soweto? However, because my distinctions are primarily visual rather than factual, in this research I was relatively unconstrained by people's *actual* class.

My research design included in-depth interviews with White women while my research concerning Black aesthetics was limited to text, media, and observation. Therefore, I formed class categories for the White women in my focus group based on class markers (e.g. their presence at a tertiary educational institution) and disclosed information regarding their socio-economic backgrounds. The young White women

[13] This group of women seem to be to be both ethnically and discursively invisible in South Africa.
[14] This reinforces the idea that in the new South Africa, ethnic distinctions, while still strongly based on apartheid racial categories, are beginning to become more fluid and more associated with class and politically associated ethnic "style".

that comprised my focus group and their mothers all came from middle class backgrounds (ranging from slightly lower middle class to upper middle class or "very comfortable"). In contrast, the class distinctions I created for Black women were based solely on their appearance and may not have reflected their actual socio-economic status. However, this is exactly in keeping with the level of contact most White women in Johannesburg have with Black women in public spaces, where people's identities are limited to what they *appear* to be. For data gathering purposes during my fieldwork I categorized all of the Black women at my main field site as "middle class" except for those Black women who were definitively identifiable as "lower" or working class through their apparel (specifically if they were wearing the uniform of a domestic or maintenance worker). I address this in more detail in chapter three.

Fieldsite(s)

While I deal with the importance of the mall in Johannesburg in general and go into more descriptive detail of the Rosebank Mall in particular in chapter two, two points are worth mentioning here. First, the Rosebank Mall/The Zone has a youthful, almost "alternative" image as a place hip young people and celebrities go. The Rosebank Mall/The Zone is a unique shopping complex in Johannesburg in that it is simultaneously elite and very popular with White people while maintaining associations with specifically Black cultural symbols. "Black" malls (e.g. the Carleton Centre in CBD) or malls in Black areas do not appear to attract as many White shoppers or maintain elite images regardless of their shops or merchandise. Therefore, the Rosebank Mall is one of the only elite commercial spaces in Johannesburg that is very ethnically diverse but also very trendy, safe, and still geographically conceptualized as "White", while drawing at least some of its popular appeal from its association with elite Black culture.

Data Collection Methods

In addition to an engagement with the relevant literature, I gathered primary data for this thesis using a combination of participant and direct observation (including timed tests and sketches), media analysis, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and surveys. I also draw on my own every day experiences and conversations. I specifically privilege subjective experiences and perceptions as orienting reality. While I do compile some of the data gained from mall and media observations into statistical form, most of the data I introduce in this thesis consists of content and semiotic analysis of the qualitative data gained through interviews and my own observations.

There are few areas in the mall where one can sit and observe key human thoroughfares without purchasing something, so by necessity I became a shopper and diner. I spent many days at the mall, walking around, shopping, sitting at various cafés and restaurants, watching people and watching them watch me. Within the categories of sex (male or female) and ethnicity (Black, White, Other), I used timed counts to gather data on who was at the mall, who they were there with, what they appeared to be doing (e.g. shopping, hanging out, passing through), and what they were wearing in terms of both style and colour. I also gathered data on the frequency and ethnic make-up of inter-ethnic couples or groups. I recorded data using these same categories at different times of day, on different days of the week, and from different vantage points within the mall. I did not use age as a data category except in the sense that I eliminated all children (defined as people who appeared to be under the age of eighteen) from my counts, except when I was analyzing interracial groups.

To gather data on Black-associated fashion in Johannesburg, I selected fourteen clothing shops on the main level of the Mall of Rosebank and The Zone and divided them into the following three analytical categories:

a) Four shops that predominantly carry brands/fashions by South African designers but that do not have a specifically Afro-centric image
a) Seven shops that predominantly carry brands/fashions that are specifically Afro-centric or Black-associated.
a) Four shops (some foreign chains) that carry predominantly foreign designed brands and fashions that have a Western or "global" style and do not carry brands or styles that could be classified as Afro-centric or Black-associated.

I then proceeded to gather - primarily through direct observation - data concerning the type of clothing they carried (brands, who designed them, where they were made, price range, styles), and who their clientele were (sex, age, income level, ethnicity). I supplemented my observations through chatting with store employees and asking them to fill out surveys.

The Who - Focus Groups Interviews and Surveys

Because my focus in this thesis is to evaluate changes relating to interethnic contact in post-apartheid Johannesburg, I set out to talk with White women who had "come of age" in an integrating, post-apartheid city where they would have (ostensibly) had very different racialized experiences than their parent's generation. While I acknowledge that the dismantling of the Apartheid state was a process that stretched over half a decade,[15] I designated South African independence in 1994 as the "end of Apartheid". I defined "coming of age" as the teen years and used turning 14 as the cut-off point, thereby establishing a focus group of ten women who were born between 1981 ad 1988, making them between the ages of 6 and 13 in 1994 and between the ages of 19 and 26 at the time of my research. The age group of women I spoke with form a sort of transitional group for whom ethnic integration is still *culturally* "new" and an on-going process, and for whom segregation is not a foreign

[15] Popularly conceived as beginning in 1989 when Nelson Mandela was released from prison. And that apartheid ideologies and practices are in many places and cases still quite present in South Africa.

concept or experience, even though they did not "grow up" under official Apartheid. All but one of the interviews consisted of at least two two-hour meetings. I recorded all interviews in writing. I maintain the terms they used, providing clarification wherever I think it necessary. In order to help temporally situate the opinions and predilections of these young women, I formed a secondary group comprised of their mothers. This second group was comprised of women born before 1969. In addition to in-depth interviews with my focus group, I asked both they and their mothers to separately fill out detailed surveys dealing with issues from body image and beauty ideals to fashion preferences, interracial dating, and peer groups. While I only integrate this comparative data in a few places, it showed a definite shift in opinion in almost every instance. Ethnographic data from interviews and surveys appear in chapters three through five.

All of the women who comprised my focus group were at that time University students in Johannesburg, and were recruited on a university campus, a relatively "safe", enclosed environment of limited access. All of them had spent their formative years living in Johannesburg. All were middle class, although three of the ten described their upbringing as lacking luxuries or identified their families as having gone through a period of economic insecurity earlier in their lives. Two of the women were Jewish, one self-identified as Christian (Catholic) and the remaining seven self-identified as either non-religious or nominally Christian. One self-identified as Afrikaans, one self-identified as the child of Afrikaans parents, and the other eight were English speaking White South Africans, although from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, including British, Dutch, German, Swedish, Irish, and Scottish. At the end of this chapter I have included a brief description of each woman's background and appearance to establish a base identity for the reader to refer back to as their names appear in the text. Each of these women are referred to in the text by aliases.

Ethics

As middle class, educated, and White, the women in my interview and survey groups represented a privileged demographic in Johannesburg. At the time of my research they were all over the age of 18, and none could be categorized as coming from "vulnerable" populations, so my main ethical concerns in this project were the issues of informed consent, anonymity, and respectful treatment.[16] In order to ensure informed consent, I verbally explained the parameters of my project to each potential interviewee before accepting their consent to be involved. I then provided them each with a written project information sheet and an informed consent form. Each of the women in my focus group also filled out anonymous surveys and delivered survey packages to their mothers (which included the survey, project information sheet and informed consent form), which were to be filled out privately and then returned to me. To the best of my ability, I applied the data gained from interviews in such a way that it does not lend itself in the text to the identification of the women who formed my focus group. This in some cases meant omitting relevant or interesting data. All of the women I interviewed are referred to in the text by aliases, which I chose for them. In my original interview transcriptions the real names of the women in my focus group never appeared in relation to their interviews and the surveys were also coded. With regards to the surveys conducted with shops at the mall, I followed similar protocols of informed consent and I do my best to apply the data gained through conversations and surveys in a way that respects the anonymity of the workers I interacted with. Moreover I left each research participant with information on how to contact me if they had any later concerns or questions.

Despite the "emotional sanitation" that ostensibly occurs when "real" life is intellectualized into statistics and academic jargon, words are powerful. Many of the

[16] While the women in my focus group were all educated, economically privileged, able-bodied White women, women as a group are a vulnerable population, and particular issues resonate more deeply with women. Particularly because I was addressing aesthetics, some of the issues that came up (e.g. body weight, dieting, sexuality) were still loaded issues. I tried to be aware that although these women were comparatively privileged on the surface, they each had long histories that were unknown to me.

women I interviewed were quite candid with me and shared information that was sometimes of a deeply personal nature. I have genuinely attempted to write about these issues with sensitivity, not only towards the women who helped me with my research, and anyone who may read this thesis, but also the very real people whose identities are being discussed in these pages. In many cases, in attempting to reflect local categories of meaning I have not moved beyond apartheid racial distinctions, some of which are offensive and all of which are to varying degrees incapable of providing adequate descriptions of real people. In other cases I have seemingly taken the liberty of changing local categories of meaning. It is not my intension to invalidate how people in Johannesburg may choose to ethnically identify themselves.

Literature Review

In what follows I will expand upon the relevant literature associated with my three main gendered themes: space and place, Whiteness, and the commodification of ethnicity (taste and consumption).

Race, Space & Place

Urban anthropology is a fairly recent area of anthropological investigation[17], and the current literature on urban (re)segregation and erosion of public space (Sorkin, 1992; Davis, 1992; Caldeira, 1992; Augé, 1992; Low, 1999, 2003, 2006; Czeglédy, 2001,2004; Beall, Crankshaw & Parnell 2002; Kruppinger, 2004; Holston 2005; Hancock, 2006) is addressing processes that are still new (or renewed) and on going. The literature I draw on most heavily in my examination of place and space address the more recent (1990's) incarnations of urban re-segregation. Central to all of these works is the changing role of the constructed (architectural) framework of

[17] Some early anthologies include Eames, Edwin 1977. *Anthropology of the city: an introduction to urban anthropology*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall. Friedl, John 1975. *City ways: a selective reader in urban anthropology*. New York : Crowell; Hannerz, Ulf *1981. Exploring the city : inquiries toward an urban anthropology*. New York: Columbia University Press.

cities in shaping and constraining human movement and more significantly, human contact.

I locate Marc Augé 's concept of the anthropological "non-place" significantly within the body of work on the new urban (re)segregation and the erosion of public space. Augé (1995) argues that the urban spaces that characterize the super-modern city – such as mega super markets, airports, and freeways - are becoming anthropological "non-places", that is, increasingly mediated, isolating, individualizing, and essentially transient. They acquire no history and they are not the locations of meaningful human interaction. For example, James Holston (2005) examines the decline of streets as places of human interaction, a process he calls the "death of the street". He documents an urban design and management trend that is eliminating streets as places of human commerce and socialization and replacing them with "high speed avenues and residential cul-de-sacs" (Holston 2005: 245). He characterizes these emerging "non-places" as having "no urban crowds, no street corner societies, and no sidewalk sociality" (Holston 2005: 251). Holston's dead streets of movement without interaction are exactly Augé 's non-places.

This theme of isolation run through much of the current work on urban space, which variably focuses on gated communities, residential security walls, transportation infrastructure (Holston 2005; Czeglédy 2004) and fortified urban economic enclaves[18] (Davis 1992, 1992b; Caldeira 2005). Conversely, they also focus on the function of public space as places where people socially and verbally interact, arguing that public space is necessary for peaceful intercultural contact (Low 1999:47), and that public gathering places are explicitly politicized spaces that figure centrally in civil society movements (in Low 1999:43). James Holston (2005), Setha Low (2005), and Caldeira (2005) make similar arguments regarding the threat to sociality and even democracy that the erosion of truly public spaces may represent to the surrounding society. However, none of them go into any detail about what exactly

[18] Primarily office buildings and shopping malls.

it is about public space apart from its "unbounded" access (i.e. freedom) that charges it with cultural significance.

Much of the work on this topic focuses on the significance of racialized class-based identities and connects them with issues of exclusionary economic privilege and fear. They situate emerging global processes of re-segregation and the erosion of public space within ethnically oriented and orienting class divides. They furthermore link these processes - not with "modernity" or technology per se – but rather with economic globalization and the resulting rapidly increasing economic disparity between rich and poor (Kruppinger 2004).[19] There is a particular focus on structural fortifications and personal security in their work (Davis 1992, 1992b; Caldeira 2005) that makes direct connections between the erosion of public space and increased re-segregation, poverty, and a "resurgence of fear of the other, especially immigrants and ethnic minorities" (Low 2006: 47). They situate the erection of security walls, White Flight/suburbanization, the elimination of streets as social spaces (Holston 2005; Caldeira 2005), and the construction of gated communities (Caldeira 2005) and giant mall complexes (Davis 1992) as a few of *many* urban developments aimed at a covert control of human movement and access which is explicitly aimed at creating spaces inaccessible to "undesirables", i.e. the racialized poor (Low 1999:44).

Much of the research being done on new forms of urban segregation use American theoretical and conceptual models. Petra Kruppinger (2004) asserts that while these processes are globally situated, they are particularly impacting large cities in post-colonies. Therefore, new analytics must be developed to speak to specifically post-colonial contexts, each of which must furthermore be approached as unique. For example, Low (1999: 44) argues that the present threat to public space is "not one of disuse, but of patterns of design, management, and systems of ownership that reduce diversity." However, unlike patterns in cities like New York (Low, 2006), public space in Johannesburg has *historically* been designed to shape and constrain

[19] With its associated (or assumed associated) violence, and increasing fear of the racialized Other.

the movements of certain people. In Johannesburg, it is the public's withdrawal from public space that is *new,* as top-down structures of control crumble. There is a particular urgency to examine issues of urban segregation in a local context.

My own research deviates from and adds to this body of work in two ways. First, my focus is an explicitly visual one. I concentrate on how the built environment alters how people *see* each other. Second, I argue that processes of privatization and (re)segregation of public space in Johannesburg is not *only* resulting in the creation of "non-places" (yards that no on can see out of, streets where "nobody" walks, etc.), it is also facilitating changes in the use and cultural significance of those non-places, with the possible effect of re-transforming them into quasi-public spaces of meaningful cultural interaction.

Constructions of White Womanhood

Crapanzano (1985:39) has suggested that in the South African context, Blacks were not 'significant others' against which White identities could be formed because they were "too different—and too distant" and so Othered Whites were used in the role of negative foils.[20] Despite the importance of class and tribalism in White identity formation[21], the apartheid system was premised on the power of a unified superior White identity, necessitating a highlighting of difference between White and Black. While Black people were not always the particular foil against which Whiteness was formed (Magubane, 2001), historically they have been placed at the bottom of a shade-based hierarchy of humanness where they function as the opposite of Whiteness. In particular, the bodies of Black women have been used to define proper White European femininity: beauty, comportment, and sexuality both ideologically (Magubane, 2004; Ware, 1992; J. & J. Comaroff, 1992; & Stoler, 1997) and visually,

[20] Also see Wray & Nevitz 2007, Ignatiev 1995, Jacobson 1998, and Sacks 1994 for more on the role of Othered Whites in White supremacist discourse.

[21] e.g. The use of the poor or 'ethnic' Whites (Irish, Mediterranean, Eastern European) to form a normative middle class WASP identity.

especially through the use of their images in product advertisements (A. McClintock, 1995; Stoler, 1992; and Nederveen-Pieterse, 1992).

In contrast to colonial European aesthetic conceptions of Africans – specifically of African women – which were initially formed largely in absentia of contact with Black people (Magubane, 2001; J & J Comaroff, 1992), racialized notions of women's beauty in South Africa were shaped directly by the *omnipresence* of Black people and the nature of the contact between White and Black women. Moreover much of the literature (with the exception of Magubane and Ribane) on the impacts of a White beauty standard are situated in an American context, and while highly useful, do not necessarily speak to the unique processes unfolding in Johannesburg where Black women are not only not a minority, but are becoming the frontrunners in a rapidly growing powerful Black middle class.

To inform my examination of White women's perceptions of Black aesthetics, I draw on contemporary works on Black beauty, including bell hooks (1992), Nakedi Ribane (2006), and Sekayi (2003) on the role of White supremacy in White aesthetics; hooks (1989), Jacobs-Huey (2004), and Rosado (2003) on the politics of Black women's hair; and Lovejoy (2001), Ribane (2006), and Hill (2002) on differences between White and Black conceptions of beauty.

Although they focus mainly on Western contexts, Kathleen Blee's (2002) work on women in racist hate groups, Vron Ware's (1992) analysis of the role of White women in White supremacist racism, and Ruth Frankenburg's (1993) classic *White Women, Race Matters* are helpful in illustrating the connection between while patriarchy and white supremacist racism.

In most scholarly examinations of Whiteness so far, the structural power of Whiteness is foundationally connected to its existence as a normative and therefore largely *invisible* set of characteristics, qualities, and conditions (Ware, 1992; Frankenburg, 1993; Hartigan, 1997; Dyer, 1997; Linke, 1999; Back & Ware, 2002; S. Ahmed, 2004). Whiteness Studies has thus traditionally centred on calling attention to the invisibility of Whiteness, and through this unveiling, deconstruct the privilege

associated with that normativity. However, in her scathing critique of Whiteness studies, Sarah Ahmed (2004) points out that for people of Colour, Whiteness has always been visible. In response to Richard Dyer's (1997) statement that "...the power of whiteness is that we don't see (White) bodies as white bodies. We just see them as bodies" (in Ahmed 2004:np). Ahmed makes the crucial point that,

> *"Whiteness is only invisible to those who inhabit it. To those who don't, the power of whiteness is maintained by being seen; we see it everywhere, in the casualness of white bodies in spaces, crowded in parks, meetings, in white bodies that are displayed in films and advertisements, in white laws that talk about white experiences, in ideas of the family made up of clean white bodies. I see those bodies as white, not human".*
>
> S. Ahmed, 2004

Dyer did however touch on the contradictions inherent in the "invisibility" of Whiteness, and called attention to the importance of *perspective* when he wrote ....."visual culture demands that whites be *seen to be whites*...(but)...the ultimate position of power in a society that controls people in part through their visibility is that of *invisibility*, the *watcher*" (Dyer 1997:44, 45, emphasis added). Both Dyer and Ahmed clearly situate the power of Whiteness not only in its invisibility to Self but also in its hyper visibility to Others.

As Fanon suggested, "the colonizer needs the colonized to "corroborate him in his search for self-validation" (Magubane 2001: 133), which meant building and maintaining a fantasy that the colonized saw him as good. The nature of relations between White and Black in South Africa has not been one of White invisibility but of *Black* invisibility and elaborate, institutionalized White self-delusion. Central to these processes, of invisibility, visibility, illusion, and delusion is the power of *sight* and the control of the gaze (hooks, 1992; Dyer, 1997).

The power of the objectified Other to look back, or to take hold of the camera and turn it onto Whiteness (and moreover what happens when they *do)* is rarely addressed in the literature. The pioneers of Whiteness studies were predominantly Black Americans (e.g. bell hooks (1992), Audre Lorde (1984), and other earlier Black academics and writers), yet Whiteness studies rarely incorporates the gaze or words

of people of Colour or acknowledges their influence on White people and culture[22]. The resultant risk is in Whiteness studies becoming a form of narcissism wherein Whiteness is reinstituted at the centre of importance (Frankenburg, 1993), or even becomes "a discourse of love" focused on "getting in touch with" a meaningful White identity (Dyer, 1997:10; Ahmed, 2004). The symbols of Whiteness are White precisely by having no ethnicity attached to them. White is absence, White is everyman, everywhere, everything. It assimilates but it also appropriates (Frankenburg, 1993; Bernardi, 1999; Dyer, 1997). As Ahmed (2004) asserts, Whiteness is already visible and so must be made visible in a different way, by establishing it as a colour – as a "race" – in order to be deconstructed as one. Perhaps the only way to do this is to take the point of view of an outsider looking in on Whiteness, to de-centre it.

Even contemporary examinations of aesthetics and ethnicity tend to cast Black women as the victims of the "assimilative power of Whiteness" (E. Kaw 1993; T. Dangarembga 1989; D. Sekayi 2003; Rosado 2003; N. Ribane 2006; b. hooks 1992; M. Lovejoy 2001; E. Newman-Phillips, 2004; M. Bucholtz & S. Trechter, 2004:15). This focus – while important – recreates the impression that encounters between White women and the "Other" are always encounters between unequals, with White women always playing the dominant role. With the notable exception of a number of excellent works on hip-hop culture, outside of sneering pop culture discourses, little is being written that recognizes or investigates the cultural influence of Black people on White or so-called "mainstream" culture. Although much has been written about the control of the Black gaze in systems of racial dominance, little has been written about the power of that gaze once that system has been overturned. That is, the interactions between White and Black women in contexts where the White woman holds little to no economic, political, or social power over the Black woman.

[22] Some notable exceptions can be found in recent cultural analyses of hip- hop (e.g. Jason Tanz, 2007 and Bakari Kitwana, 2005) but this work is also mostly coming from Black American academics.

In seeking out the ways in which Black femininity can function as an identity of power, I intend to apply Bourdieu's notions of cultural capital, specifically "body capital" (1984: 206) to examine how power operates on and through women's bodies as racialized visual objects. My evaluation of the flows of aesthetic influence will also be guided by Michele Foucault's notions of the micro-mechanisms of power in the everyday (Seasick 1991; Foucault 2000), especially in his theory that we internalize and act as agents of our own social control. Through this, I intend to test the limits of Liz Frost's (1999) suggestion that "doing looks" (i.e., women actively pursuing beauty ideals) can be empowering, by extending it to include racialized notions of beauty – especially those that are associated with either privileged or subversive identities (Newman-Phillips 2004; Sekayi, 2004; Ribane, 2006).

The Commodification of Ethnicity (Consumption and taste)

There have been a plethora of scholarly and popular works that focus on the assimilating impacts of a globalizing Western culture on people of Colour (particularly as it relates to the consumption of Western-associated consumer goods). The implication is that people of Colour are either forced to exist outside of this culture (in inferior, "ethnic minority" cultures), or are allowed to assimilate into White culture, a process that is paradoxically posited as simultaneously harmful, desirable, and inevitable. These types of discourses (often in neo-liberal economics or development discourses) essentially recreate earlier anthropological and colonial discourses regarding the noble and timeless savage and reify White culture as normative and desirable. There are few works that deal with the ways "ethnic" symbols institute themselves as part of middle-class White culture, or how middle-class White culture is itself carries an ethnic identity.

The one notable exception to this trend is the growing body of critical, engaged work on the cultural impacts and meanings of hip-hop amongst White people (e.g. Bakari Kitwana, 2005; Jason Tanz, 2007). Kitwana, and Tanz deal not only with how

Black American culture has been marketed to White people, but they also attempt to look at why Black cultural forms hold such incredible mass appeal to White people in America to begin with; why it has become "cool" to be Black. This is the important question that too few works are delving into in any meaningful way – *why do so many White people have a desire to be assimilated into a Black cultural identity*. These works, as well as recent work on the adoption of Black language styles among non-Black youth (Chun 2001; Hill, 1998; Cutler, 1999; Bucholtz 1999; Bucholtz & Trechter, 2004) highlight the possibilities as well as the contradictions inherent in viewing Black as an ethnically inclusive cultural identity in the United States.

Marilyn Halter (2000) takes a more explicitly economic approach, arguing that "ethnic" identity in America is becoming a marketable commodity as "ethnic" goods flood the market and people of Colour appear increasingly in advertisements. Ruth LaFerla (2003) similarly identifies an American pop culture trend towards celebrities (actors, musicians, and especially models) who are "E.A." "Ethnically ambiguous", that is a mix of ethnicities and neither Black nor White. Halter identifies this movement towards market recognition of diversity as stemming from both the growing economic security (and buying power) of formerly Othered ethnic groups, and as a backlash against the perceived meaningless homogeny of (White) American culture, which is itself defined by middle-class consumption patterns (Hartigan 1997, 1999; Ortner 2006). Drawing on the postulation that Whiteness is a vacuous or blank distinction, devoid of any "authenticity" or meaning of its own (Bucholtz and Trechter 2004; Hartigan 1996; Linke 1999; Chun 2001; Bernardi, 198; hooks 1992), and "that being nothing, having no life, is a condition of whiteness" (Dyer, 1997: 80), the cultural attraction of the Other as "authentic" and cool - particular, different, unique, creative, *un*-White - becomes clear.

Other sources on the appropriation of ethnic symbols focus on the connection between political power, the commodification of "ethnic" fashion, and perceived social threat. One argument centres on the idea that it is only once an Othered population

has been "subdued" and no longer poses a "threat" to those in power, that their aesthetic forms can be safely appropriated, transformed, and often divorced from their original cultural meanings through commodification and de-contextualization (Trevor-Roper, 1983; Chapman, 1995). Another argues that through commodification, cultural symbols are automatically de-contextualized and robbed of cultural significance (e.g. the White appropriation or adoption of Hip-Hop), or that their importance was created through commodification in the first place, e.g. the connection between hip-hop and branding (see Kitwana, 2005) or the use of Che Guevera's face to sell everything from underwear to health food (see Heath & Potter, 2004). This offers a particularly interesting analytic to apply to racialized aesthetics in post-apartheid Johannesburg, where the formerly threatening Other (Black people) have *not* been "subdued" but are rather in an increasingly powerful political and economic position, and where the commodities they are associated with are not being separated from their ethnic identities.

Work on ethnic symbol appropriation (or adoption) and ethnic blending in the United States (La Ferla, Halter, Kitwana, Tanz) and the U.K. (Chapman and Trevor Rope) tend to primarily deal with masculine cultural forms. While the hip-hop analysis in particular is useful, it is limited in the context of Johannesburg where Black cultural forms do not yet seem to resonate with White males, where local Black music (e.g. Kwaito) and cultural forms are limited in their cross-over appeal due to language barriers and persistent cultural and social apartheid, and where it is white women rather than white men who seem to be engaging with Black cultural symbols (particularly in the form of fashion). However, Kitwana (2005) makes the argument that the appeal of hip hop to White women is primarily sexual in that it facilitates access to Black males. This connection between adopting the commodified symbols of a culture and partner seeking or sexual identification is an under-examined aspect of inter-ethnic relations, particularly in Johannesburg.

Focus Group Participants – Background

Stephanie – b.1988 in Durban. Moved to Johannesburg at three months. Six years old when Apartheid officially ended. Grew up in a predominantly White elite Northern suburb. She is from a "comfortable" upper-middle class family. Parents are professionals. Attended integrating schools. Is English speaking and defines herself as a "White South African". Is well travelled, both in Africa and abroad. Stephanie repetitively expressed a fascination with Black culture and people.

Stephanie is tall and slender, with freckles, blue-green eyes and long, straight, wheat-coloured hair. She has a very understated but label-conscious style that is classified as "preppy" or "sporty". She has a large disposable income and therefore a very large wardrobe. She formerly modelled with a local agency.

Amanda – b. 1983. Eleven years old when Apartheid officially ended. Grew up in a middle class, fairly integrated eastern suburb. Her parents are artists and she categorizes herself as middle class though her family has few luxuries. Amanda tended to focus on her own struggles to move beyond the judgement of others and claim her own body and sexuality. She primarily framed this struggle in terms of clothing.

Amanda is mid-height, with light brown wavy hair and hazel eyes. She is slender although she informed me that she was "overweight" until recently. She wears colourful, patterned clothes and she shops mostly in discount, Black-associated shops such as Truworths.

Astrid – b. 1988 in Cape Town. Six years old when Apartheid officially ended. Moved to northern suburbs in Johannesburg at fourteen. Mother owns her own business. She describes her family as having struggled financially.

Astrid is short with a petite, athletic build. She has brown eyes and mid-length naturally curly dark blond hair, which she always straightens. Her style is casual, very jeans and T-shirt. Due to financial constraints she owns very little clothing.

Hannah – b.1984 in Johannesburg. Ten years old when Apartheid officially ended. Grew up in northern suburbs. Identifies her parents but not herself as Afrikaans. Has an ethnically diverse group of friends and expresses irritation at enduring racism, complaining that "some people just haven't moved on".

Hannah is tall and big-boned. She has short, straight, dark hair and dark, sleepy, deep-set eyes. She dresses in conservative chic (long skirts, little colour), in styles that hide her figure. She rarely wears heels due to her height. She wears heavy eye make-up.

Anika – b.1981 in Johannesburg. Thirteen years old when Apartheid officially ended. Moved out of the city from ages five to sixteen at which point she returned to Johannesburg. She self-identifies as Afrikaans and attended an almost exclusively White Afrikaans-medium school until the age of sixteen. Is bitter towards the ANC government and sees B.E.E. as "reverse discrimination".

Anika is short with a heavy-set, very curvy figure. Her eyes are brown and her short straight brown hair is dyed bright blond. Her clothes are androgynous, largely second-hand, self-altered and/or have a distinctly punk/activist flavour.

Rianne – b.1988 in Johannesburg. Six years old when Apartheid officially ended. Grew up in the northern suburbs. Rianne has always attended integrated schools and says that her elementary (primary) school broke the law to admit Black students before it was legal to do so. Rianne dates mostly Black men and laughingly admitted that it is a joke amongst her friends that she is a magnet for Black men. Rianne's Black female friends from high school drifted away when they started tertiary.

Rianne has straight, mid-length wheat-coloured hair, bright blue eyes, and pale, freckled skin. She is short and curvy. Her clothes are conservative and plain but colourful. She rarely wears make-up and her jewellery is minimal.

Mary – b.1987 in Johannesburg. Seven years old when Apartheid officially ended. Lived in Northern suburbs, now lives in Melville. Mother and father have mid-level, non-professional jobs. She defines herself as middle-class but privileged. Mary's home environment, social scene, and circle of friends are White.

Mary is mid-height with a very slender, medium build. She has very curly dark brown/black hair that is twisted into long, thick dreadlocks. Her eyes are blue and she has clear, rosy-cheeked skin. Mary's style is a mixture of many aesthetic elements but locally she would be classified as "alternative" or "emo". She often wears skirts over pants, and a lot of layers but in a dark "alternative" rather than hippy way.

Naomi – b.1986 in the UK to British Jewish parents. Moved to South Africa at the age of fourteen. Mother does not work, father is in insurance. They are upper-middle class and live in a "small Jewish Ghetto – there are big ones" in the northern suburbs. Attended a private Jewish high school. Has travelled extensively. She was beginning a relationship with a man from Botswana at the time of our discussions. She has a dramatic, outgoing, energetic personality and strong opinions that she seemed to have no reservations about sharing.

Naomi is short and slender but curvy, She has blue eyes, medium length blond straight hair, and very pale skin which she says burns very easily. Her style is casual/athletic but *very* colourful. She shops at Black-associated shops.

Eva – b.1986 in Johannesburg. Eight years old when Apartheid officially ended. Grew up in two predominantly Jewish suburbs in Johannesburg. Describes her upbringing as one lacking luxuries (lower middle class). Attended an all Jewish high school on sponsorship. Eva was recently married to a Jewish man who she describes as "a good provider". Eva predominantly discusses ethnic relations in Johannesburg in terms of urban degeneration, the Jewish community, and integration in elementary (primary schools).

Eva is medium height and very slender but busty. She has brown eyes and very curly, long, dark brown hair, which she straightens. She pointed out that she has very stereotypically Jewish features, particularly her nose. Her style is simple but mainstream fashion (lots of clingy cotton T-shirt layers and little colour) and she admits that her new husband influences her to dress conservatively.

Joanne – b. 1986 in Randburg. Eight years old when Apartheid ended. Attended a private Christian high school. Has travelled extensively both within and outside the

continent. Has a diverse peer group at school due to her programme of study, has dated Black and Coloured men, and socializes in diverse areas and crowds.

Joanne is very short and curvy with a round face. Her eyes are brown and her hair is light brown and wavy.

CHAPTER 2

Walls and Malls: Putting Race in its Place?

Welcome to Johannesburg. Jo'burg. Jozi. This seductive city of glaring contradictions where the most shocking poverty lives not so far down the road from the most vulgar displays of wealth; where the cheapest, threadbare polyester pants walk right by the pinkest pair of Prada heels; where the beautiful and the ugly co-exist in such breathtaking extremes that it instils in you – the observer – a feeling of constant vertigo, of visual overload. Refugee/ migrants from Zimbabwe set up their canvases on the sidewalk outside of the most shi-shi up-market gallery; a woman goes on parade wearing a wildly inventive home stitched creation made from third-hand thrift store finds, confident that it could stand up to the latest haute couture – and *it does*. Johannesburg is a place of dazzling visual syncretism (or is it schizophrenia?) where the aesthetic boundaries between "high" and "low", traditional and modern, White and Black, local and foreign are not blurred so much as Picasso-ed – shaken, not stirred. How does one begin to talk about beauty in such a place? What does it look like and where does it live? I suggest that we must start at the source of beauty, that is, in the eye of the beholder.

Today, even many of the most elite neighbourhoods in Johannesburg are just a pretty shadow of the illusionary veneer of perfection they maintained under Apartheid. Under Apartheid, the structural design of the city coupled with laws constricting the free movement and residence of people of Colour created the illusion of a White city. As these laws (e.g. Group Areas, Pass Laws, etc.) were repealed in the late 1980's and early 1990's, Johannesburg became rapidly transformed into a *visually* Black city. This had the effect of bringing White people into sustained visual contact with large numbers of Black people over which they could no longer exert control, thus smashing the illusions of a dominant White presence. Today, daily

human contact in Johannesburg continues to be shaped and constrained by design, but in somewhat different ways. Security walls have replaced pass laws, creating visual and physical barriers between (people in) houses and (people on) streets. Private cars shield commuters from contact with the street vendors, beggars, and thieves that work at intersections, as well as from the less fortunate masses who "get around town" using public transportation (Czeglédy 2004). The absence of park benches on streets means that most places where one could sit and observe the life going on around them – that is, at cafes, restaurants and bars - are reserved for people who can pay. Most "nice" public spaces are either no longer nice or are no longer *public*. Since 1994, as formerly White communities have become more integrated, the well-to-do have increasingly moved north, barricading themselves behind security walls and inside gated communities. Many took their business with them, abandoning the city centre to crime and decay.

This chapter is guided by S. Low's argument that because public spaces are the only places where truly diverse crowds can interact peacefully, that "the erosion of public space is ultimately a threat to peaceful integration, cultural diversity, and sharing" (2006: 47). What are the meanings and functions of public space in Johannesburg, a city where public space has become synonymous with crime and violence, and where the very distinctions of private and public are shifting? In Johannesburg - as in many global metropoli - the spaces that formerly functioned as places of neighbourly greetings and random meetings, socializing and street deals – that is, sidewalks, streets, and parks - are becoming the "non-places" (Augé, 1992) of hyper-individualization, *constant movement* and mediated human interaction (Kruppinger, 2004; Holston, 2005). In this chapter I will examine post-apartheid changes in the visual human environment in Johannesburg by looking at three major aspects of the built environment: security walls, streets, and shopping malls, specifically the Rosebank Mall. By looking at these processes of increasing (re)segregation and erosion of public space in the unique context of post-apartheid

Johannesburg, I will illustrate the ways in which they are inadvertently creating new quasi-public spaces of meaningful human interaction that may ultimately combat the very processes that created them – that is segregation and fear of the Other.

In the Name of Safety

"We shape our buildings and then afterwards, our buildings shape us"

Winston Churchill
(in Kleniewski 2006:11)

Johannesburg was not always a city of walls. Under Apartheid, White children played freely in the streets and parks and White neighbours waved to each other from their front yards. Today, most residential dwellings have some form of security fencing, and upscale homes almost always have security walls fortified with electric fencing or razor wire. Nancy Kleniewski (2006: 12) argues, "A city's built environment is a reflection of its social structure". In Johannesburg, the presence of security walls reflects a society of great inequalities, still deeply divided by class and ethnicity, and permeated by fear of the other. Regardless of the suggestion offered by Anika that the reality of violent crime *followed* rather than preceded the walls[23], or that the presence of walls increases rather than decreases people's safety by alienating neighbours from one another, once a fear becomes realized it is difficult ever after to separate anxiety from actuality. In Johannesburg, most people have accepted the alienation of fortifications in the hope of ensuring "security" (Hancock 2006:4).

In addition to ostensibly protecting the people on the inside, security walls alter community relations. Many of the women I spoke with either expressed that they no longer know any of their neighbours or that they never have (depending on their age), and that because of security walls there is no longer a sense of community

[23] And that the trend was jump-started by security and construction companies exploiting the pre-existing racialized fears of wealthy White homeowners

in their neighbourhoods. In addition to alienating neighbours from one another, security walls can be seen as playing a key role in processes of (re)segregation in Johannesburg. By 2005, the growth of the Black middle class in Johannesburg had gone into warp speed, and their residential movement into the suburbs has started to reflect that growth. In 2005 77% of Black South Africans lived in Black townships, but within *one year*, by 2006, the number of Black South Africans living in the suburbs had *doubled* from 23% to 47% ("S.A.'s booming black middle class", 2007:np). However, by visually separating houses from one another and from the street, security walls to some extent render residential ethnic integration largely *invisible.* In this environment, no matter what the ethnic make-up of a neighbourhood is, residential integration in a cultural sense ceases to be possible.

In creating visual and physical barriers between houses and streets, security walls are also functioning to alter the social nature of public space in Johannesburg. In up-market suburbs such as Parktown North and Sandton, the streets (which are commonly clean and lined with large majestic trees) can frequently be seen from inside the "compound" or private property. Pedestrian entry gates tend to be beautifully designed and are frequently elegantly barred rather than opaque, creating a two-way portal – a window – between the front yard and the street. Conversely, large (i.e. up-market) properties in less upscale neighbourhoods such as Melville or Auckland Park tend to have opaque entry points, and many lack pedestrian doors entirely, as if assuming that all visitors will arrive in cars – moving from cocoon to cocoon (Czeglédy, 2004). From the inside of many private properties and gated communities, one would have little to no view of the street. Therefore, residential security walls not only ostensibly protect the people on this inside, they also ensure that the outside world (with its unsightly decay and Othered human traffic) is blocked from view. They function as a sort of visual cleansing aimed at disconnecting people from what makes them uncomfortable, and as such, they protect both delicate aesthetic sensibilities and unquiet consciences.

Black Taxis and the Monochromatic Commute

> "How about we put up a wall between the houses and the highway and then you can go your way and I can go my way".
>
> Ani Difranco "Fuel"

A. Czeglèdy (2004) suggests that Johannesburg's transportation infrastructure (both the actual street layout and the public transport system) not only shapes and constrains the movement of people around Johannesburg, it determines the relative ease or difficulty with which *certain* people can access *certain* spaces (Czeglèdy, 2004:63). People who own private vehicles move about the city with relative ease and safety while those who rely on public transportation are constrained by time, reliability, and often finances. Although Black people are increasingly integrating the Northern suburbs, residential patterns in Johannesburg are still largely segregated.[24] The former townships remain almost wholly Black, and Soweto still remains "cut off" from the rest of the city "by design" (Czeglèdy 2004: 66). The lingering legacy of the intentional inaccessibility of the townships is an informal curfew on poorer Black people. Those who rely on public transportation must leave the city by the early evening as most kombi mini-bus taxis stop running around 8pm and trains to outlying "Black" areas such as Soweto are not regarded as safe at night. The segregatory effects of the transportation system are clearly reflected in the decreased levels of ethnic diversity in suburban social spaces at night.

Only 34% of the people in Johannesburg have private vehicles, and 72% of public transit users - almost all of them Black - take kombis (SA Census 2001; Czeglèdy 2004:73). Kombis, which sprung up as an unregulated, informal shuttle service between the (Black) townships and the (White) suburbs, are cheaper than city buses and despite their unregulated schedules and routes, run more frequently and to more destinations. Kombis could theoretically have become an integrated form

[24] Many Black people in Johannesburg still reside in former Black townships (e.g. Soweto and Alexandra) and in de facto designated Black areas such as CBD or Yeoville. There are also Coloured areas (e.g. Westdene) and Indian areas (e.g. Linasia).

of travel, particularly because they are disproportionately used by Black women and would therefore perhaps be seen as less of a safety threat. However, due to the negative image that has come to be associated with kombi's, they are strictly viewed as the form of transportation for poor Black people. In addition to being dangerous, kombis are often an *undignified* way of travelling. You are crammed into uncomfortably close quarters with strangers and you arrive at your destination inevitably rumpled, sweaty, and reeking of diesel fumes. In addition, being in close physical quarters with Black people, particularly Black men would be an unfamiliar situation for many White women in Johannesburg and this undoubtedly also contributes to their avoidance of Black taxis – they are simply too close for comfort.

Transportation is thus another "public" realm where Black and White are visually segregated from one another through privatization and avoidance. The perceived danger of being an exposed, vulnerable pedestrian in public spaces and the racially segregated (and therefore stigmatized) nature of public transportation has resulted in an extreme car culture in Johannesburg. Even with the risk of violent carjackings, virtually everyone who can afford to drive a car, does. The segregation and privatization of transportation is also altering the human demography and social function of other public spaces in Johannesburg.

Seeing no Evil and the Blacking of the Streets[25]

> They caught the last poor man, on a poor man's vacation
> They cuffed him and they confiscated his stuff
> and they dragged his black ass down to the station
> and said "ok the streets are safe now.
> All your pretty white children can come out to see Spot run"
> And they came out of their houses and they looked around
> but they didn't see no one.
>
> Ani Difranco, *'Tis of Thee*

> "In Portuguese, the word "street" signifies "city" because it refers to a particular type of place that only cities have"
>
> James Holston, 2005:252)

[25] For clarification, to "black" something means to apply a black varnish or polish to something usually but not always already black, such as a wood stove or shoes.

The segregated nature of the human environment in Johannesburg can be readily observed simply by walking its streets. Since the late 1980's, Johannesburg's streets, like many of its parks and other truly public areas, have been increasingly abandoned both by the municipality and by White citizens. As a group, White people in Johannesburg largely no longer walk, bicycle, or rollerblade on public streets. Even at mid-day, residential streets are near deserted, and even in busy commercial areas, pedestrian traffic is low. The side effects of these withdrawals are visually evident, both in the state of the streets and whom you will find there. The elegant guerrilla[26] landscaping taking over the sidewalk space in front of certain walled properties and the smashed beer bottles, crumbling sidewalks and collapsed gutter covers found on many streets even in "good" neighbourhoods are testaments to the degree that a sense of both "community" and government responsibility are receding into the past. According to J. Holston (2005) as cars "replace" pedestrians and social interactions shift to the "safety" of people's homes and other private venues, streets become socially dead spaces. In Johannesburg, many streets have not so much died as been designated as Black spaces, making them socially dead only for *White* people. Pedestrians *as a group* have not been traded in for cars; it is just that White people no longer walk, so almost all of the people on the streets are Black.[27]

With few exceptions,[28] the areas in Johannesburg that still host a bustling street culture are areas where Black people comprise the visual majority: e.g. CBD, Yeoville, and Hillbrow. These neighbourhoods feature sidewalk fruit and vegetable markets and street vendors of every sort. Especially early in the morning and in the

[26] I am referring to the current phenomenon wherein some up-market homeowners and business owners in Johannesburg have begun to extend their landscaping jurisdiction to outside of their properties and are literally taking over and in some cases eliminating the sidewalks in front of their properties as a public walking space publicly maintained with public funds and transforming it into an extension of the exterior landscaping of their property. It is a visually pleasing but somewhat disturbing trend as it seems indicative of an evanescing municipal government.

[27] However, with private security companies beginning to *police* the streets in some communities in the Northern Suburbs there are even few Black people on the streets. Those streets have become purely a place to pass through on your way to somewhere else – true non-places.

[28] Seventh Street in Melville is one notable exception, but sociality there is still limited by fear (and reality) of crime.

early evenings you can find women selling roasted mealies (maize) or *maandazi* to workday commuters, or having their hair done at pro tem sidewalk salons. The sidewalks are hectic with movement and men stand about in pairs or small groups chatting. Everywhere there are people, there is *life*. Unfortunately, the areas with the most vibrant street life in Johannesburg are also often considered overcrowded, dirty, and dangerous. Walking through these areas, mine was frequently the only White face on the street. The streets of Johannesburg are not dead, but they are often exclusionary, ethnically segregated places.

The Inclusive Exclusivity of the Mall

In Johannesburg, where the (White)[29] public realm has contracted so rapidly and to such a great degree, shopping malls, (and the mall in Rosebank in particular) have come to be more accessible and ethnically diverse than conventionally public areas, and have come to fulfil many of the same cultural functions. I categorize The Rosebank Mall as a surrogate public space based on two main criteria: one, despite the fact that certain people (i.e. beggars) are not *welcome* and could be *removed,* almost anyone - regardless of ethnic identity, sex, occupation, education, income, or sexuality - is free to simply walk inside.[30] It is a money-made democracy; one of the very few elite spaces in Johannesburg where there is relatively open access and ethnic diversity. Secondly, and of vital importance to this thesis, the Rosebank Mall is an explicitly visually oriented and orienting space – it is a place where people go to see and be seen.

Public culture in Johannesburg was long based on the social illusions made possible by apartheid, and so a desire to escape (both physically and emotionally)

[29] It is important to acknowledge that truly public space did not exist in Johannesburg under apartheid and the trauma of its apparent disappearance now is due to its impact on White sociality not on the disappearance of public space in general, as it is in some other global cities.

[30] Some level of state or social control exists in every space constrained within the state, including so-called public parks, due to laws regarding human *conduct* in general. That the mall authorities have the right to remove "undesirables" from the premises does not automatically designate the mall as a socially private space. The police can remove "undesirables" from streets and public parks too. "Public" is in all places a relational designation.

from the more recent encounters with unpleasant reality is unsurprising. At the Rosebank Mall there are no local street vendors guilting you into buying their goods, but there *is* a charming African Craft Market where you can purchase high quality handcrafts made by "authentic" (*read: not urban*) Africans. Conveniently confined to an area accessible off of the parking lot, they must wait for you to come to them. With all of the guards milling about and the controlled car exits, the threat of crime suddenly seems distant. There are no homeless children here, no blind beggars and no drunks. The one Coloured woman who begs with her two children at the Rosebank Mall on the weekends is somehow only mildly irritating because she is not one of an endless many. Although this "fantasy" world may be functioning as an escape from the sometimes-harsh realities of a post-apartheid Johannesburg, I argue that it does not seek to recreate apartheid[31]. Instead, in some small ways it realizes the promises of the Rainbow Nation - after all, here we "all" are "together". I feel that this particular illusion: one of safety and freedom, affluence and integration; one of a shared class identity - a common ground - forms part of the mall's appeal. I also suggest that rather than function negatively - as illusions generally do - this illusion of integrated harmony provides one of the few opportunities for people in Johannesburg to imagine, and play - virtual reality style - with the idea of building such a society. Nancy Fraser defines the public realm as an "unbounded, expansive space of social interaction, free exchange of ideas, and political action that influences governmental practice" (Low 2006:43). While the Rosebank Mall is not quite that, the escape it offers from reality has the potential to make real the illusion, specifically because the mall is one of the few "safe" places in Johannesburg to which people of different ages, ethnic backgrounds, and incomes have access where negative tensions of race and class can be to some degree temporarily left "outside".

[31] As is the case with some exclusive clubs in areas such as Sandton that seek to circumvent equal access laws through exclusionary dress codes and prohibitively high entrance fees.

The Rosebank Mall/The Zone appears to have been designed to meet the changing social needs of a post-apartheid Johannesburg. Its architecture invites a psychic feeling of expanse, airiness, and light. There was clearly an effort made to reproduce an outdoor, sidewalk cafe experience within the 'safe' confines of the mall parameter. The parking lot and "outdoor" aisle nexuses are lined with cafes and restaurants, and even inside the mall proper, all restaurants have "outdoor" café's in the central aisles of the mall, thus "maximize(ing) the intersections of gazes" (Nuttal, 2004:434). These patios appear to have been designed to provide the illusion of freedom and "normalcy" to people living in a city too dangerous to maintain a true sidewalk café culture. The Rosebank Mall is the shopping centre equivalent of the gated community – it offers the safety of confinement pleasingly disguised as openness and freedom.

Sitting one day sipping a coffee at Café Nescafé at the main entrance to the Rosebank Mall, I was struck by how much it felt that I was actually at an urban sidewalk café - except there was no street. But there was something of that bustling to-and-fro, hurried stride/parading peacock strut/shuffle; that unspoken contract of watching and being watched; that sense of aliveness that is conspicuously absent from most Johannesburg streets. The Primi Piatti "patio" is enviably situated overlooking both the "piazza" and the escalator that delivers people into The Zone. On Friday and Saturday nights it is not uncommon to spot local celebrities there, busily seeing and being seen. It is precisely in this seeing and being seen - this visual contact - that for the purposes of my research, makes the Rosebank Mall significant as a "public" place, as a gendered female space, and a place that could potentially facilitate meaningful interethnic contact between young White and Black women in Johannesburg.

CHAPTER 3

Seeing in Black and White

"I'm looking through you, where did you go?
I thought I knew you, what did I know?
You don't look different but you have changed.
I'm looking through you – you're not the same"

The Beatles, *I'm Looking Through You*

How do we know what is beautiful? Is beauty what is *normal* or what is *different*, rare, exotic? Does the Colour of our environment colour our perceptions? In this chapter I discuss the possible impacts that the increasing *visual* presence of Black women in public spaces, specifically the Rosebank Mall, may be having on the aesthetic sensibilities of White women. I focus on embodied aspects of beauty, specifically hair and body shape, as traits that are infused with racialized connotations and values. In my research, I set out to investigate how White women's conceptions of beauty may be changing through the processes of both seeing and *being seen by* "empowered"[32] Black women. Specifically, I wanted to determine if these two *new* processes are causing some White women to begin to look at themselves through the eyes of the Other, through a lens of Blackness.

Woman as Object, Woman as Subject – Seeing Other, Seeing Self

"Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at....[The woman] turns herself into an object - and most particularly an object of vision; a sight"

John Berger, Ways of Seeing

[32] i.e. middle class, elite, beautiful, fashionable, "put-together", stylish, etc.

Historically, middle class White women in Johannesburg have rarely had cause to be aware or critical of their appearance as being *White*. Moving within predominantly White environments, White women aesthetically competed with other White women[33] according to a White normative beauty standard. Until the mid to late 1990's, most middle class White women simply would not have been in the company of Black women over which they did not exercise compounded forms of power (economic, legal, political, etc.), nor would they have ordinarily been subjected to aesthetic comparison with Women of Colour in any competitive sense[34]. Generally speaking, even today there are few middle class White women who regularly frequent areas of the city designated as Black[35] or place themselves in social situations where they are a visual minority. Of the ten young White women I interviewed, only one counted a Black woman within her close circle of female friends. They all described their lives as still very socially White, a situation that they all felt had been exacerbated by the transition from secondary school to tertiary. The apparent lack of social mixing between young White and Black women and the hesitancy of young White women to insert themselves into diverse social environments (which are often in Black areas or at Black designated events) heightens the significance of the shopping mall as one of very few places of interethnic female visual contact, a place of watching and being watched, made all the more attractive because of its *transience* and comfortably *anonymity*.

Shopping, and consumer culture in general is commonly associated with femininity. S. Nixon (1992: 150) writes, "consumption associated with the body, beautification, and adornment in particular has historically spoken to the female consumer, producing her as an active consumer *but also a 'spectacle' herself - to be looked at, subject to a predominantly masculine gaze"* (emphasis added). While I

[33] i.e. For male attention and female admiration.
[34] As competition would indicate some sort of equality or potential equality. The structures of Apartheid worked to ensure this would not happen.
[35] Note that although certain areas are popularly conceived of as Black (e.g. Braamfontein, etc.), this can also be a transient, situational distinction. For example, there are Black bars or Black nights at bars. What designates a Black space as Black is the presence of Black bodies in it.

acknowledge the role of men in influencing women's aesthetics (a discussion we will return to later) because malls are places of feminine sociality and consumption, women at the mall are just as, if not more, aware of being the visual object of other women. In addition, when asked about feminine beauty standards, the young women I interviewed discussed their self-image in relation to the standards and judgements of other women as often as those of men.[36] Echoing a common theme throughout the interviews, Astrid talked at length about the power of young women to intimidate one another. She revealed that during high school she "cried every day" and like Amanda, was better friends with boys than with girls because of what she referred to as "that judgemental, catty, back-stabbing mentality". She admitted that even now, "I look at the ground most of the time. Not because I have no confidence, but because I don't like pretty people – they're intimidating...I get so tired". Anika took a more depersonalized, political point of view, wherein she presented this female aesthetic competition as divisive and damaging: "There is no female sisterhood because of this comparison...we are in a competition for worth, for validation". Speaking about the prevalence of plastic surgery among women in Johannesburg she pointed to female culpability: "It is more than patriarchy – WE (women) define it. We take what they (men) want and do it to the extreme". Thus, while women may model themselves *for* men, the judgements of other women strongly influence the way the women I interviewed chose to construct their appearances.

Guess Who's Coming Shopping?

"The Place to be seen and the people to be seen, only at the Zone at Rosebank"
The Zone website

The image of the Rosebank Mall as a manifestation of the "new" South African dream - diverse, peaceful, affluent - was at least superficially borne out in my

[36] In both cases this was expressed as a negative, damaging process.

observations. Black women on average consistently comprise at least half of the women in the Rosebank Mall during the busiest times of the day (roughly between 11am and 3pm). [37] The chart seen below shows the percentage breakdown by sex and ethnicity of a particular sample group of 128 shoppers I observed in a timed test during a weekday at approximately 2:00pm. Notice that White women represent a visual minority in general, not just among women.[38]

Figure 1.0 Average mid-day data from the "piazza"

GROUP	% Of WOMEN/MEN	% Of TOTAL (all men and women combined)
Black Women	50.7% of all women	27.3% of all people
White Women	49.3% of all women	26.5% of all people
Black Men	71.3% of all men	32.8% of all people
White Men	28.7% of all men	13.2% of all people
TOTAL: 128		

My observations over the course of the day however, showed a pattern of shifting representation at certain times. For example, around mid-day (between approximately 11:30 and 3pm) the proportions of Black women and White women were fairly stable, with Black women usually slightly outnumbering White women. At dinner time (after 4:30pm), the number of White women in the mall dropped sharply, leaving more Black women. After 8pm, the numbers of White women spiked while the numbers of Black women dropped dramatically[39]. Figure 1.1 illustrates this pattern. The data I gathered on different days and from different sites around the mall nonetheless resulted in similar statistical representations.

Figure 1.1 Women at Rosebank Mall throughout an average day

GROUP	2:30 pm	5:30 pm	8:30pm
Black women	47.5%	68.4%	29.3%
White women	52.5%	31.6%	70.7%

[37] This was consistent regardless of the particular day of the week.
[38] East Asian, Indian, and Coloured (according to my visual classification system as outlined in the methodology chapter) women comprised approximately 5% of the women at the mall.
[39] Note that these statistics *do not* represent a skew in the data resulting from a decrease in the numbers of one group *or* an increase in the other, but actually illustrate to scale *numerically,* that is to say that where one rises the other actually fell (e.g. where White experienced a decrease, Black experienced a near proportional increase, etc.).

The relative absence of Black women in the Rosebank Mall at night seems to reflect the racialized nature of residency and the commute in Johannesburg and is at least partially shaped and constrained by transportation options (as outlined in Chapter 1). While there is a statistical lack of ethnic diversity at Rosebank in the evenings, this seemed to apply disproportionately to women in their early teens and women in their 40's while the numbers and ethnic balance of women who appeared to be in their twenties (the demographics with which I am most concerned) seemed to remain rather stable.

As mentioned previously, the nature of contact between White and Black women under Apartheid was predominantly that of a White "madam" and her Black "maid", an arrangement that often rendered Black people "invisible....except as a pair of hands offering a drink on a silver tray" (Sallie Bingham, *Passion and Prejudice*, in hooks 1992:168). It would have been easy for wealthy White women - with their carefully polished notions of beauty – to dismiss the beauty of these women who they saw daily. In Johannesburg, telltale "uniforms" distinguish certain people as "the help". Because of this, I felt it would be relevant to account for the women at the mall who were visually ghettoized in this way. I found that the vast majority (between 84% to 100%) of Black women at the mall could not be dismissed solely due to a class-based aesthetic.[40]

From the numerous points of observation, White women at The Zone/Rosebank Mall can observe Black women of a great variety of "looks": the tall, dark-skinned model with shorn hair executes a kamikaze catwalk across the uneven stones of the piazza in impossibly high designer heels; the slender, bespectacled professional, dressed in smart, tailored office wear, her straightened hair pulled back into a glossy bun conducts a lunch meeting at Primi Piatti; a woman with luminous skin and almond-shaped eyes sits perched on the edge of an armchair in Exclusive Books

[40] Between 0% and 16% of Black women wore uniforms. Between 8% and 18% of Black males at the mall were uniformed, which means that between 82% and 91% of Black men, who comprise the greatest majority at the mall, were aesthetically middle class.

reading a novel, her dreadlocks caught up in a colourful head wrap. The great array of different Black female beauties represented by the Black women at the mall challenges physical stereotypes of Black women, and illustrates an aesthetic heterogeneity that is largely missing from White notions of feminine beauty. Many of these women are dressed to the nines in heels and skirts, or are rocking creative new street fashion. At the Rosebank Mall, Black women form a powerful aesthetic presence.

Looking Back, Looking Black

You're thinking of me, the same old way
You were above me, but not today
The only difference is you're down there
I'm looking through you, and you're nowhere

The Beatles,
I'm Looking Through You

The mall as a space where everyone is relatively equally vulnerable to evaluation by others (and Others) creates a sort of visual democracy. The watcher inevitably is also the watched, and everyone is compelled to be aware of their position as object. To reiterate an earlier point, while Black women have always "seen" White women, within environments of racial domination their gaze – however seeing – had to take on the appearance of being veiled (hooks 1992). In the context of post-Apartheid Johannesburg, Black women's increasing economic, political and cultural power means that Black women are increasingly in a position to sit in the seat of *open* surveillance of White women. Amanda seemed to feel that young Black women were even particularly intimidating because, "I don't understand African languages, so if you walk by (a group of Black girls) and they speak in vernacular and laugh, you never know if they are talking about you". The mall seems specifically *designed* for this form of subtle judgement and control that exists largely without any personal contact.

In a society that formerly conceived of Black and White "beauties" as irreconcilably different - that conceived of beauty itself as White - how can Black women begin to be seen as beautiful? The increased visual presence of Black women - that is, their increasing *normativity* - is not in and of itself enough to reverse a culturally entrenched devaluing of Black bodies. Black women do not just need to be seen, they need to be seen *as beautiful*. I argue that the popular embracing of Black "looks" – specifically hair and body shape – by Black women themselves forms a foundational element of Black aesthetic influences in Johannesburg.

The Politics of the Head

"One dreadlock is thicker than one strand"

Dead Prez, *Revolution*

Sybil Rosado argues that hair is "more important than skin colour, language, or religion because it serves as a critical marker of race and group identity" (Rosado 2003: 61). Of all stereotypically Black traits, hair has received the most attention in terms of racism and racial classifications in South Africa. During apartheid, in cases where the legal racial designation of a person was in question, the "pencil test" was sometimes employed.[41] This "test" involved inserting a pencil into a person's hair and if the pencil stayed put, then science had quantitatively proven that they were Black. As a centrally defining characteristic of Blackness, "African" (kinky or very curly) hair became conflated with an inferior social position, poverty, and an undesirable aesthetic – that is, with ugliness (hooks 1992; Rosado 2003; Newman-Phillips 2004; Ribane 2006).

> *"Psychoanalytic theories of identification all seem to agree that "imitation repeatedly veers over into identification...(and) racial mimesis generally does reproduce existing relations of power and privilege. Corporal appropriations of whiteness thus sustain interior colonies and the violence within."*
>
> *Uli Linke, 1999:133*

[41] Specifically when the ambiguity was between distinctions of Coloured and Black.

For Black women, relaxed hair has functioned in the past as a tool of access – a form of social capital (Bourdieu, 1984). Even as people of Colour move into the White, middle class world, socio-economic success has remained strongly conflated with a "White" aesthetic (Kaw, 1993; Newman-Phillips, 2004; Rosado, 2003; hooks, 1992). As argued by bell hooks (1989b;1992), because "straight" hair is associated with Whiteness, relaxed Black hair can function to reinforce a negative valuing of Blackness.[42] It is not a benign policy that at many private schools in Johannesburg, Black girls were (and in many cases still are) *required* to straighten their hair to keep it "tidy" and Black boys were required to keep their hair closely clipped. No "nappy" heads allowed. Because of the White supremacist associations between Black hair and ideas of dirtiness and ugliness, Black hair care has been a particular focus for Black feminine beauty and especially since the American "Black is Beautiful" movement starting in the 1960's, it has become a powerful political symbol of resistance against White supremacy (hooks 1992; Rosado 2003; Newman-Philips, 2004; Ribane 2006).

Despite the tenacious popularity of straightened hair, a new generation of young Black women (and men!) in Johannesburg appear to be engaged in a hair-emancipating revolution of Afronomical proportions. The young Black women I observed at Rosebank Mall variably rocked dreadlocks, mohawks, spikes, twists, turbans, China bumps, knots, and a variety of other ingenious hair designs that speak not only to a wildly creative, cosmopolitan syncretism, but also to a defiant pride. Regardless of her particular style (which could range from a demure coil to a precariously perched work of modern art) a Black woman who chooses to not straighten her hair carries on her head a symbol of her ethnic identity. This symbol, *by its very presence*, rejects being negatively valued. Former model Nakedi Ribane

[42]That a rejection of Blackness may often not be the motivation behind hair straightening is largely socially irrelevant, as it nonetheless eliminates a key aesthetic difference and form of specifically *Black* beauty, thus reinforcing stereotypical White female physical traits as normative and superior (hooks 1989, 1992). It is also a lot more likely for White people without any knowledge of Black hair care to automatically assume this to be the case, rather than recognizing other possible motivations, e.g. ease of care, desire for a change, attraction to a certain style, creativity.

states that, “it is evident that Black people are now tired of the Western images they have had to bear with over the centuries. They want to be their own masters and mistresses in how they perceive beauty and life in general” (Ribane 2006:122).

White Girls, Black Hair

“I’m not a White girl with Black hair I’m a. White girl with MY hair”.

Mary

If Black hair is a particularly poignant location for ethnic identity and resistance against White aesthetic norms, what impact is this apparent embracing of Black hair having on White women’s hairstyles? At first estimation there appears to be no crossover at all -White and Black women’s hair is just too different for comparison (is it not?). Based on both my observations and my interviews, it appears that the feminine ideal in Johannesburg is still the same old straight-haired blonde. But on closer examination, it seems that like Black women’s hair, White women’s hair is also a location of contesting White and Black aesthetics. Rather than being neutral and normative – measured only against a White standard - it also is subject to both negative and positive associations with Black hair.

Stephanie looks rather like she stepped off the page of a Tommy Hilfiger ad. She has long, straight, honey blonde hair, green eyes, and light, freckled skin – the South African version of the All-American Girl. She stated that “Black hair on White girls looks skanky and trashy. It just doesn’t suit your hair type, your scalp is all see-through – ew”. At Stephanie’s high school in the northern suburbs, White girls who came to school with cornrows or braids were sent home and told to “fix” their hair, but she explains that those were “the dirty smoker girls who just wanted to break the rules”. Again, at no point did Stephanie ever make any association between White girls copying Black hairstyles, and an embracing of Black*ness*. Interestingly, this

negativity that seems to be directed at White girls with "Black" hair (such as braids or dreadlocks) also appeared to apply to curly hair in general.

It seems that in Johannesburg there is a general cultural rejection of curly hair, not only among Black and Coloured women but also among White women. Many of the Black people I broached the issue with explained that curly hair – especially *very* curly hair - is associated with a non-White *ethnicity* (e.g. Jewish or Coloured) and is generally not considered by White people to be an attractive White trait. Four of the women I interviewed have naturally curly hair; three of the four straighten their hair with straightening irons, while one, Mary, has dreadlocks. While all four asserted that it is currently a *trend* in Johannesburg to have straight hair,[43] none seemed to have any explanation for the fact that quite apart from any issue of fleeting trends, they all quite intensely *disliked* the curliness of their hair and had since childhood. Eva, who is Jewish, barely acknowledged the stereotype that Jewish girls have "'fro's", and seemed uncomfortable with discussing curly hair as an ethnic marker. This seemed particularly poignant as Eva claims some distant Black ancestry, a point that was not brought up in this discussion. I found it somewhat astounding that no one made any racialized connection to a dislike of curly hair in a country where the degree of curl in one's hair was formerly used to determine relative personhood.

Because Mary's hair is naturally curly, unlike most White people's dreadlocks, hers are fat and well formed. She does not wrap her dreads like Rastafarians do but usually wears them loose or pulled back in a ball. Apart from her hair, there is nothing in her appearance to suggest an affinity with Black cultural symbols at all. In fact, Mary vehemently denied that her dreadlocks have any connection whatsoever to Black culture, associating them instead with alternative White culture and music. To White people her hair is often a sign of either lesbianism or an otherwise counter-culture rebellion, while to Black people, especially Black men, they assume there is a

[43] Eva connected this trend with aesthetic influence from the United States and Mary informed me that in a certain restaurant in Durban they have installed the expensive brand of hair straightening iron in the ladies room, where women can pay five rand to use it for five minutes.

connection with Blackness, an assumption that seems to irritate her. She recounted an incident wherein a Black girl in one of her classes at tertiary approached her and said, '(*Mary*), dude, I actually think you're really cool. I saw you in first year and you were this White girl with dreads and I had my doubts'. Mary continued, "I didn't say 'Hey, I saw you with relaxed hair and I thought 'yeah, she wants to be White'. I'm not a White girl with Black hair I'm a. White girl with MY hair".

That Mary denied the Blackness of her hair does not in any way remove the fact that dreadlocks are a Black aesthetic symbol. Her refusal to recognize them as such could reflect a reality that while racialized aesthetic symbols can be appropriated as symbols of *resistance*, their racial Otherness is often denied (Kitwana 2005; Trevor-Roper 1983). Yet the influence is there; their Blackness is in the very fact that dreadlocks are seen as subversive. And to be like Blacks is to be unlike Whites, or at least unlike *proper* Whites. Thus, Mary expressed that before she put her hair into dreadlocks three years ago, like Eva and Astrid, she "hated" her curly hair and straightened it. However, she stated defiantly that now she thinks curly hair is "a hundred times more beautiful than straight hair and when these (her dreadlocks) come off, I'm going curly". At one point Mary commented that her dreadlocks "have their own spirits. They collect things. Like a dream-catcher on your head". She seemed unaware that she was discussing her hair in mystical terms, similar to the way that many Rastafarians do.

White Women, Black Bodies

At first glance, body ideals for young White women in Johannesburg appear disturbingly reminiscent of those of Victorian England. They seem to similarly privilege aesthetics of rarity, thinness, and even illness and appear to be constructed around the same factors of White masculine power, class, and White supremacist racism. The persistent ideal seems to be tall and very thin with disproportionately large breasts, and no hips or bottom. However, despite the tenacity of this image, the

women I interviewed seemed to suggest its primacy is beginning to be significantly contested by a more African-oriented body ideal.

Unsurprisingly, when Black and White women's bodies are compared, the most common stereotypes focus on issues of weight and body shape. First, to be considered beautiful by White standards a White women must be thin. While some of the women I interviewed seemed to want to avoid directly defining a local body ideal, Stephanie was characteristically frank: "Skinny....almost male... androgynous". Tellingly, each of the young White women I interviewed repetitively brought the discussion back to issues of weight and thinness. Stephanie spoke bitterly of her past experiences working with one of the top modelling agencies in Johannesburg. Although she is tall and very slender she was not eligible to "do ramp" (get runway jobs) because she was not "thin enough". Anika, who is much bigger framed than local conventions would deem "attractive", furiously articulated what she termed a "fear of fatness" among women in Johannesburg, saying, "Girls in school were t*aught* to go on diets, so they developed food issues – fuck!" Anika was the only woman I interviewed who made explicit connections between present beauty ideals in Johannesburg and power relations in the post-apartheid context. She stated angrily,

> "I think White women are expected to be very skinny. It is related to how (White) men are resentful right now, and it is also the opposite of Black (women's) beauty – a stupid skinny White person who doesn't ask questions.... it was never a standard to look that way (before), but now that women can do whatever they want, now we're screwed, so we'll make them small and give them all these issues and fuck them up. I look the way I look and I'm not going to change, but sometimes I think that way too: weighing against a standard and failing".

Stephanie defined body ideals in terms of racialized male attraction as well, explaining, "Big boobs are a plus, but no butt unless you're Black, because Black guys like big butts". "Big butts" were presented as an *un*desirable feminine trait according to White men but a desirable trait according to Black men. We will come back to this point a little later.

It is no surprise that next to slenderness, all of the women I interviewed expressed the importance of large breasts as a desirable female attribute according to (White) men, and several connected this to issues of class (male production). For example, Eva informed me that twelve (White) girls in her graduating class at high school got breast augmentation surgery as matriculation presents *from their fathers*. Because the stereotypical ideal – skinny with very large breasts - is not a naturally occurring body type for most women, especially most White women, and therefore must be purchased, doing so reinforcing a beauty standard that is both physically and *financially* unattainable for most women – a class marker. Similarly, Stephanie emphasized that (White) men currently idealize "exotic" women with "dark skin". When I asked Stephanie if by "dark skin" she meant *Coloured* women, she exclaimed "NO! They like *White* girls with a *tan*, NOT *Coloured* girls". Astrid and Amanda – both of whom have grown up in families that were not financially well off – also mentioned the phenomenon of "rich" White women getting "spray" tans. This did not have much meaning for me until my partner began harassing me again to stay out of the sun and teasing me that "only Poor Whites are red".[44] It seems that the ability to avoid getting a "real" tan and the ability to procure a "fake" (spray-on") tan become symbols of proper (i.e. elite) White beauty, which is dependent upon one's ability to purchase it.

Quite in contrast to buying into the White ideal of the skinny blonde, several of the women I spoke to readily identified shifting beauty norms in Johannesburg as moving towards a more Black aesthetic. Rianne articulated the South African ideal in stereotypically Black terms: "Thin waist, big boobs, round bum", adding that in South Africa, they embrace an "African figure (that is) more curvy than European ideals" and "we are much more tolerant of different body shapes". Stephanie, who had identified the thin, buttless blond as the local ideal, nevertheless described her *personal* ideal using a local Black celebrity. Similarly, while Hannah felt that there

[44] "Poor Whites" not only frequently walk or use public transportation, they are also commonly manual labourers or "outside people" so their skin tends to take on a dark, weathered look, thus breaching acceptable racial and class boundaries of Whiteness.

was a continuation of distinct racialized beauty standards for Black and White women (the curvy Black women vs. the skinny blonde) she nonetheless went on to say, "Some Black women are so beautiful. I don't envy a lot of White women's beauty....skinny Barbies, that's not pretty".

The Male Gaze

It was my intention in this thesis to focus on the visual and cultural connections between White women and Black women, but through the interviewing process it became clear that I would also have to mention the role of men. Although the women I interviewed had detailed (White) men's impact on how they conceptualized the ideal woman's body (and how their own bodies related to that ideal), it soon became clear that this process was also racialized. While reviewing my field notes I noticed that the women who described the "new" feminine ideal in Johannesburg as incorporating Black-associated feminine features are women who had dated, or were dating men who are not White. Similarly, all but one of the women who voiced acceptance or appreciation of their own bodies were also the same women who had or were currently dating "outside" of their "race" (for example, Naomi's dramatic declaration that "I wouldn't give my boobs up for anything! I wouldn't give my butt up for anything!"). Mary, who identified herself as a participant in the "alternative" arts scene in Johannesburg, felt that women "in the scene" have been conditioned to find "skinny, intense" boys attractive,

> *"But they have not made the same concessions. They are still quite happy with their FHM[45] (model) chick; it's just that now she must have tattoos. (White) guys aren't changing their stereotypical wants. They haven't expanded their consciousness. I find Black men are more open to different body types. I find Black men in general think you're sexier in different body shapes, but White men are so afraid of a girl who is not size eight".*

[45] FHM – For Him Magazine, an American glossy for men which is primarily composed of photographs of barely dressed White women.

Mary's observation seems especially relevant when taken in tandem with Anika's earlier statement making connections between White men's perceived loss of power and the ideal of the "stupid, skinny" White woman in post-Apartheid South Africa. Many young White women are not unaware of Black stereotypes concerning their appearance, and Stephanie alluded to the fear that when compared to Black women *by Black men*, White women may not be able to measure up. For example, she pointed out that a Black man might look at a White woman and say, "Yeah, she's pretty, but she needs some ass". In contrast, Hannah complained that (White) men do not even look at her because she is "not the average White girl" (who is "shorter and smaller"), yet she also dismisses the compliments of her Black male friends because they as a group are not potential partners. "They say 'we like your butt, we like your curves'...(but) I just don't want to end up with a Black or Coloured man." It seems that even though she acknowledged the beauty of Black women, she could not conceive of extending that beauty standard to herself, at least partially because she perceived that White men (her desired partners) would not share it.

These examples reinforce the idea that the public gaze that falls on White women is no longer an entirely White gaze. Recall my earlier assertion that the mall is a space of feminine sociability and consumption - a place where women go to see and be seen *by other women,* men seemingly a rather insignificant presence in such spaces. When the men being discussed are *White*, this is true. But, revisit Table 1.0 for a moment and look at the sex/"race" division at Rosebank Mall. At a hip, young, very "now" mall, men represent 47% of the people at the mall, and 71.3% of those men are Black. At 13.2%, White men remain a small and rather transient minority.[46] Therefore, if White women *are* going to the mall to see and be seen by men, *which* men? The Black male gaze is evidently shaping at least some young White women's aesthetic perceptions.

[46] Most of the White men I observed at the mall were either on the move or seemed to be on business lunches. Few appeared to be "hanging out". Especially during the day, I found that women were either at the mall alone or with other women.

As different conceptions of beauty and bodily attractiveness begin to collide in Johannesburg, White women are inevitably finding themselves measured against both each other and the Other. A conversation Amanda had with the Black woman who works in her aunt's house captures this collision well: "She told me 'You're getting fat' and I thought 'Oh!...is that good or bad?' There's so much cultural diversity..."

CHAPTER 4

Mediating Beauty

> "Images play a crucial role in defining and controlling the political and social power to which both individuals and marginalized groups have access. The deeply psychological nature of imagery determines not only how other people think about us but how we think about ourselves."
>
> bell hooks (1992:5)

In a visually oriented culture where the communication of cultural symbols has become so technology-based, it is the mediated images we see of women - in advertisements, in magazines, on billboards - that tend to structure our major frames of reference for reality (Nederveen-Pieterse 1992; Dyer, 1992; hooks, 1992). Like Whiteness, the *influential* power of mediated images stems from their omnipresence and therefore their "invisibility"; they are everywhere, you see them without really looking; their messages are internalized largely through intellectual osmosis. The portrayal of women in Western media is often examined in a negative light as creating and perpetuating negative or limiting racial and gendered stereotypes. Indeed, the control over images has played a fundamental role in systems of racial oppression and in many cases continues to do so (hooks 1992:2). That said, mediated images also have the potential to be a tool for positive societal transformation. The *transformative* power of media images stems at least partially from the fact that they are largely based in fantasy – that they create *new* images and are therefore uniquely positioned to manipulate and refashion reality rather than to simply reflect it.

An examination of mediated images of women in post-Apartheid Johannesburg is relevant to this thesis for three reasons. First, although ethnic integration is certainly happening, of the women I spoke with only Rianne and Hannah said that it was largely *im*possible to maintain social segregation. Naomi and Eva felt that especially within insular Jewish communities it is still possible to avoid social contact with Black people, and Naomi admitted that before tertiary she was never in mixed social environments. Joanna asserted that while it was possible for people "even five

years older than us", she hoped it was not possible for people her age. Under these conditions of seemingly persistent apartheid, there are clearly limits to the extent to which many young White women can have meaningful in-person contact with Black people. Second, as mentioned, I have identified what I perceive as a fear among young White women of the judgement of Black women. As a fear of being seen, and more significantly a fear of being caught looking, this is encouraging a *visual disengagement*. Therefore, in contrast to relations of seeing between people out in the "real" world which are constrained by myriad relations of power, fashion magazines are the ultimate experience in inter-ethnic virtual reality: you can scrutinize without being subject to scrutiny; you can look without being caught looking. Thirdly, because the use of mediated images of women has played an integral role in the creation and perpetuation of White supremacist notions of beauty, it is necessary to examine to what degree these representations have changed. Since 1994, influence from American pop culture, Black involvement in advertising and the consumer force of the emerging Black middle class have begun to alter the ethnic landscape of modelling and advertising in Johannesburg. While the media has certainly been used as a tool of oppression, exploitation and exclusion, I argue here that the way Black and White women are being portrayed in mediated images, particularly in women's fashion magazines, is not only beginning to reflect changes in societal notions of beauty, but is also functioning to *create* those changes.

Shifting Representations

"Image-making is political"
bell hooks (1992:5)

Nakedi Ribane (2006:12) explains that Black women of her generation grew up worshipping the glamorous beauty of White Hollywood stars such as Elizabeth Taylor and Audrey Hepburn but "there were no Black women mentioned in the same

vein as these Goddesses of Beauty".[47] Rather, stereotyped images of Black women that were used to sell commercial products to Whites were often "grotesque or humorous" rather than beautiful (Halter 2000: 29; Nederveen-Pieterse 1995). Filmmaker Yunis Vally explains in his documentary film, *The Glow of White Women* (2007) that growing up under apartheid, the only images of beautiful women he could access were images of White women in his sister's fashion magazines or the scantily clad White women in the serial magazines made for "the boys on the border"[48]. Images of glamorous or sexy Coloured or Black women were simply not available. In a process he refers to as "manufactured desire", this absence of images of Black or Coloured women had the (unintended side) effect of fostering in him a "passion" for White women and a worship of White beauty. But if you take more than a cursory look at images of women in Johannesburg today, you can see that things have begun to shift.

The women I surveyed indicated that after in-person encounters the factor that had the most influence on their notions of beauty and style were fashion magazines, so I chose to evaluate the images of women that appear in two popular "mainstream" (i.e. White) women's fashion magazines: South African *Cosmopolitan* and South African *Marie Claire*.[49] I contrasted representations of women in these magazines with those in American Vogue[50] and *True Love,* a fashion, beauty and lifestyle magazine marketed to Black women. Marie Claire (South Africa) has predominantly South African content with a focus on "real" women's lives. Cosmopolitan (South Africa) boasts "Voted SA's best women's magazine - and the coolest!" on their June 2007 cover. Their content and images are a mix of foreign and South African. True Love's content and images are almost entirely South African and address many

[47] According to Ribane, 98% of Hollywood leading ladies are still White, so in this regard not much has changed (Ribane 2006: 124).
[48] The "boys on the border" refers to South African "anti-insurgency" forces on the borders of Namibia, Zimbabwe, and/or Mozambique in the 1970's and 80's. These "girlie" magazines were illegal for men of Colour to posses.
[49] These magazines have different issues in several countries, e.g. South Africa, U.S.A., U.K., etc.
[50] Although I reviewed both American Vogue and British Vogue, I chose to use the statistics from American Vogue due to the evident American cultural influence among young people in Johannesburg, although the stats were almost identical. I did not review French or Italian Vogue.

issues of particular concern to South Africa's Black communities. There is a strong portrayal of "real" women (not models) who simultaneously embody attainable everyday beauty and high glamour. I added (American) Vogue as a comparison because it is an entirely foreign magazine of a similar genre. First I looked at statistical representation by sex and ethnicity. Figures 1.3 through 1.5 outline the ethnic demographics as a whole, and then separately according to sex.

Figure 1.2 Images of All People

MAGAZINE	White people as % of total	Black people as % of total	Other people as % of total	Total Number of Images (100%)
Cosmopolitan	77.8	21.2	2	542
Marie Claire	75.7	15.8	8.5	442
True Love	20	75.6	4.4	381
Vogue	95.5	2.9	1.5	380

Figure 1.3 Images of Women

MAGAZINE	% White Women	% Black Women	% Other Women	Total Images of Women
Cosmopolitan	79%	20.2%	0.8%	336
Marie Claire	79.1%	12.5%	8.4%	343
True Love	19%	77%	4%	315
Vogue	95.18%	3.11%	1.68%	353

Figure 1.4 Images of Men[51]

MAGAZINE	% White Men	% Black Men	Total Images of Men
Cosmopolitan*	76.7%	23.3%	206
Marie Claire	72.2%	27.8%	79
True Love	24%	76%	63
Vogue	100	0	27

The images in both Cosmopolitan and Marie Claire reflect an ethnic demographic that is more representative of the United States (or an apartheid city) than of present day Johannesburg. In a 10th year anniversary spread showing 43 back- issue covers of Marie Claire, only three Black women are featured: Jada Pinkett,

[51] In commercial fashion and beauty spaces in Johannesburg in general and at the Rosebank Mall in particular, White men are the *least*, and Black men the *most* represented. Of the 206 images of men in this issue (June 2007) of Cosmopolitan, forty-eight (23.3%) were of Black men, twenty-nine of which were part of the 101 HOTTEST MEN ALIVE spread. In the absence of this special feature spread (i.e. in a normal issue) only 9.2% of the men pictured in this issue were Black.

Beyonce Knowles, and Halle Berry. Also, these women all appeared with long, straight hair and light skin.[52] Two other women of Colour, Jessica Alba and Jennifer Lopez, also are featured. Although True Love rarely features White women on their cover (and never a White woman alone), out of the four, True Love was the magazine that came the closest to being ethnically representative of the South African population, even though it also slightly overrepresented White people.

Figure 1.5 Ethnic Demographics of South Africa (2001 Census)

	Black & Coloured	White	Asian/Indian
South Africa	80%	16%	4%
True Love Magazine	75.6%	20%	4.4%

An easy explanation could have been a reliance on product advertisements featuring White women, but this was not always the case. White women were also featured in the images accompanying articles. It seemed as though there was an effort being made to be inclusive. Because White women rarely appear on the cover, (the only part of True Love most White women are likely to see) True Love is classified as a "Black woman's magazine" even though it is by far the most ethnically inclusive magazine. It is easy to see a Black woman on the cover and extend this reasoning to an assumption that Black women and White women do not have much in common and therefore need separate magazines. After all, what do White women know about Black hair care? Or dressing to suit a Black figure? However, because White women can be "Everywoman", a magazine with a White woman on the cover is not understood by White people as being similarly exclusionary and alienating for Black women. It seems that in the magazine world Blackness can be assimilated into Whiteness

[52] Although neither Jada Pinkett nor Beyonce are particularly light-skinned

(slowly and to a degree), but not the other way around, as then it is Whiteness and not Blackness that is "lost".[53]

Still Manufacturing Desire?

Of importance here is not only who is represented in these magazines, but how they are represented. In this regard two main trends stood out. The first concerns the appearance of sexualized images of Black and White women, and the second relates to class-based portrayal. Recalling Yunis Vally's (2007) experiences of "manufactured desire", in both *Marie Claire* and *Cosmopolitan* there was a general absence of sexualized images of Black women. Without a single exception, in both magazines, every image that featured a woman in lingerie, in swimwear, or in the intimate company of men features a White woman.[54] This is in keeping with my general observations of public advertisements (billboards, posters, bus stop placards, and fliers) from around Johannesburg. Black women appear frequently in ads, but sexualized ads feature White women. This is true in everything from billboards advertising lingerie to advertisements for Sandton strip bars and newspaper ads for escort services.[55] One striking exception is a large billboard on Old Porch Road in Soweto. The enormous image of a reclining Black woman wearing a skimpy bikini is a tourist advertisement inviting people to visit Kwa-Zulu Natal. The positioning of this image in Soweto places it firmly within Black visual space and makes clear who its targeted audience is (Black males). It also renders it visually irrelevant for the overwhelming majority of White people in Johannesburg, who would have little occasion to be in Soweto. It is unclear whether this trend is the result of a conscious effort to combat the stereotype of the super-sexualized Black woman, a manifestation

[53] I cannot help but think of this as an analogy for the possibilities of ethnic integration, which is frequently positively presented as Blackness being swallowed by Whiteness.
[54] This was not always true to the same degree in other issues of Cosmopolitan and Marie Claire but the trend was consistent – Black women were disproportionately underrepresented in sexualized images.
[55] A website showcasing videos of new lingerie fashions in Johannesburg also reflected this exact trend. There were few Black models and they received much less camera time than the White models.

of the stereotype of dangerous Black sexuality, or an avoidance of sexualized images that exist outside of a veneration of White women and White male control.

"Money Whitens"

> *"If profits are threatened, that's when you get White people in this country to act."*
>
> Sheema Duncan, Black Sash
> (Back & Ware 2002: 141)

According to Nakedi Ribane (2006:98), the increasing representation of Black South African women in modelling and advertising is a direct result of White businesses "scrambling" to capitalize on the growing purchasing power of Black females. Similarly, commenting in 1998 on the growing "ethnic market" in America, Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan flatly stated that, "Discrimination is patently immoral, but it is now increasingly being seen as unprofitable" (Halter 2000: 46). There is a tendency to see these trends – the mainstream availability of "ethnic" products such as Asian baby dolls and Black hair care products – and the corresponding increasing visual representation of "ethnic" models in advertising and fashion as purely economic developments. Moreover, middle class status, and therefore the Black women who enter into it, are often constructed in popular discourses in Johannesburg as culturally "White". Surely there are connections between Black economic empowerment, Black buying power, and the increasing presence of images of elite Black women in White women's magazines, but these connections are not absolute. Nor, I would argue, does middle class have to be understood as being synonymous with "White".

The Black women depicted in *Marie Claire* and *Cosmopolitan* are almost all symbolically upper-middle class, which is depicted as young, business-oriented, beautiful, sophisticated, and stylish. Unlike in *True Love* where women are frequently depicted wearing glamorous creations from Stoned Cherrie or another Black-associated fashion label, in the "White" women's magazines there was very little

overtly Black-associated fashion[56] or vibrant cosmetics use, and Black women are depicted engaging in stereotypically elite activities. For example, in the June 2007 edition of *Cosmopolitan*, one of the main fashion spreads features a young Black girl horseback riding, outfitted in full riding regalia. Horseback riding is a familiar symbol of elite leisure activity. These images challenge both cultural (Black people do not horseback ride) and class (Black people cannot afford to horseback ride) stereotypes about Blackness. Black women are also portrayed in this edition of *Cosmopolitan* practicing yoga (also an elite pastime), in skincare, cosmetic, and fashion ads, as well as in "everywoman" articles relating to women's issues such as arguing with your boyfriend, professional development, stress management, and bargain shopping. There is no pap and meat here; instead Black women are pictured eating leafy green salads and Asian stir-frys. The message is clear: the good life = (what is perceived as) the White life. Perhaps the problem is not the depiction of Black women "adopting" elite "White" lifestyles, but people's conceptions of what "White" and "Black" lifestyles are in the first place. The Black women in *Cosmo* and in *Marie Claire* are portrayed as beautiful, healthy, strong, sophisticated and professional. Rather than simply equating Whiteness with goodness, might this not also serve to de-racialize goodness by challenging its Whiteness? In essence the only thing "White" about yoga and Asian stir-fry may be White people's apparent disproportionate knowledge of and access to them, a state of affairs that is rapidly changing.

While the increasing spending power of Black people, particularly Black women is certainly playing a role in the way they are being portrayed in the media, it is inaccurate to see this process as simply being fuelled by economics, or by solely White responses to Black upward mobility. Black women have *always* represented an enormous consumer base in South Africa[57] but the use of images of Black women –

[56] Although local fashion spreads do feature Black-associated fashion labels/shops like Stoned Cherrie, Sowearto, and YDE.
[57] And their relative poverty notwithstanding, market research indicates that poor people (just like wealthy people) often consume beyond their means (hooks, 1992:28)

especially positive images of Black women - was nonetheless avoided under Apartheid. As bell hooks so succinctly points out, “image-making is political” (hooks: 1992:5). The presence of accomplished, world-class Black models, and the depictions of “everyday” Black beauty in “White” South African women’s magazines represents a cultural and political shift as much as an economic one. These shifts are at least partially being fuelled by pop-culture trends being imported from America.

Pop Culture, The JLo-ization of America, and Aesthetic Resistance

So Cosmo says you're fat
Well I ain't down with that!
'Cause your waist is small and your curves are kickin'
And I'm thinkin' bout stickin'.
To the beanpole dames in the magazines:
You ain't it, Miss Thang!

Sir MixALot, *Baby Got Back*

Marilyn Halter (2000:178) points out that since the early 1990’s there has been a global trend towards using black models and models that appear to be of mixed race, what Ruth LaFerla (2003) refers to as the appeal of the “ethnically ambiguous” (E.A.). However, even as Halter identifies the growing cultural capital of cool associated with embracing an ethnic identity in America, she erroneously equates having a mixed ethnicity or being E.A. with having “no race”– a safe aesthetic space where the hyper-politicized polarities of Black and White are conveniently avoided. This reflects the bigger trend among academics and “liberal Whites” to declare race (and therefore racism) passé (hooks, 1992; Ahmed, 2004). But like the ANC’s platform of non-racialism, this denial simply *highlights* the presence and significance of race (MacDonald, 2007). Beauty is not being de-racialized, it is being *multi*-racialized. And rather than seeing the increasing ethnic diversity of advertising and fashion as a movement towards an acceptably light or White identified “ethnicized”

beauty standard (which is how it is often implicitly discussed), I argue that it is indicative of the ongoing pull towards an explicitly Black aesthetic.

The Black celebrities that appear in *True Love* are frequently local celebrities such as Simphiwe Dana and Lira, while the famous Black women in *Cosmo* and *Marie Claire* are almost always American. South African youth culture is heavily influenced by American pop culture, which at the moment is heavily influenced by Black American (hip-hop) culture. Within this culture there seems to be a trend towards an embracing of non-White feminine beauties (LaFerla, 2003; Halter, 2006). In particular, mixed Black women, Latina women and (more recently and to a lesser degree) Asian women are increasingly visually present in film, music, fashion and beauty circles. It is not a coincidence that many "ethnic" female celebrities (e.g. J-Lo, Jessica Alba, Nelly Furtado, M.I.A., Mariah Carey) are closely associated with Black cultural icons and art forms, or that prominent hip hop artists are increasingly featuring Latina and Asian women in their videos. Latina pop star Jennifer Lopez, who graces the cover of the June 2007 issue of *Marie Claire* has strong ties with American hip hop culture, and the cover of the June 2007 issue of *Cosmopolitan* features Portuguese-Canadian singer Nelly Furtado whose career took off after she collaborated with rap legend Missy Elliot and adopted a more hip hop oriented image**.** Hip-hop culture is to some extent embracing ethnic diversity in female beauty, and it is significant that within this trend there is a tendency to exclude White women – or for White women to exclude themselves.

In one of the elite cosmetics shops in the Rosebank Mall there was a large promotional poster for *Unforgivable*, the new signature cologne by American hip hop artist, fashion mogul, and prominent Black businessman Sean "Puffy" Combs. Mr. Combs appears in the foreground of the image, wrapped partially in a white bed sheet, an East Asian woman lying with her head in his lap. Another woman, who appears to be Latina, lounges in the background. Like many recent hip-hop videos, this ad

contains the powerful message of an inclusive, multi-ethnic sexuality. I argue further that in this case the Latina and East Asian women are *symbolically* Black.

In the United States, certain ethnic groups formerly counted as "honorary Whites" if they were lucky, and "lessthanwhites" (Muscio, 2005) if they were not, have come to be aesthetically embraced as honorary *Blacks* in popular culture. White or "morethanwhite" (Ibid) celebrities that are considered "voluptuous" or possess "ethnic" qualities (e.g. Jessica Alba, Jennifer Lopez, Catherine Zeta-Jones, Shakira, Scarlett Johansson, and Angelina Jolie) are positively associated with a non-White identity. Much attention is given to their "exceptional traits", for example, Scarlet Johansson's "voluptuous curves", Angelina Jolie's lips, Shakira's hips, and especially J-Lo's bottom which has been credited with starting a "booming industry in silicone buttock implants in the U.S." (Simpson, 2001:np).[58] What is significant is that while exceptions, these women are portrayed as desirable *because* of their *difference* from stereotypical White notions of feminine beauty and attractiveness. It is furthermore significant that the traits considered desirable in these women are traits stereotypically associated with Black women: curvaceous figures, full lips, rounded bottoms. Apart from hair, the size and shape of Black women's bottoms - what Ribane (2006:20) refers to as "that specifically rounded 'African heritage' - is most frequently named in popular discourse as defining the Black body (hooks, 1992).

In her research about racialized female body image in America, Sekayi (2003) found that despite the negative power of the media, Black college- aged women were increasingly resistant to the media's portrayal of American – read, "white" - beauty standards. She quotes several young Black women expressing confident pride about their "Black" bodies, "....'cause I know personally I want a bigger butt because I've found that that's what guys like more"; and "Even the White people that we like or that I find attractive will have what I will call a Black quality like a big butt or big lips

[58] Searching "J-Lo's Butt" results in 263,000 hits on Google and 47, 900 hits on Yahoo Search. It is clearly a topic of much popular discussion.

or something like that." (Sekayi 2003: 472). One of the areas where this shift away from a White aesthetic is most evident in Johannesburg is in the local modelling industry. While Stephanie felt that models have a lot of impact on other women's self-image through advertising and grimly pointed out that "the current Face of Storm (the spokes-model for a top local agency) is a (White) anorexic girl", she also noted that the models who "get all the jobs" are either the "really skinny White girl or the Black girl with the shaved head". Ribane points out that due to a greater aesthetic emphasis on darkness and authentic *Africanness*, so-called Coloured models who used to get work because they were not *too* Black are now being overlooked because they are not Black *enough,* and even the Miss. South Africa beauty pageant is under pressure to become "completely African" in its evaluation of beauty (Ribane 2006:14, 23).

A focus on healthy Black bodies (especially celebrity bodies) in the media has the power to begin to chip away at stereotypical and mutually damaging feminine ideals. Black women are a lot more visible in White women's magazines than they used to be, and they do not all "look like White girls". About a quarter of the Black women in *Marie Claire* and *Cosmopolitan* are shown with "natural" or "African" hair (i.e. not straightened). And while those models were not nearly as curvaceous as the women featured in *True Love* (many of whom are celebrities rather than models), they were not all stereotypically White-bodied (i.e. skinny with no bottom) either.[59] While numerically underrepresented, the Black women in these magazines are clearly Black, and that Blackness is portrayed as normal and beautiful. As much as middle-class status may be conflated with Whiteness, the positive portrayal of Black and Black-associated (honorary Black) women in these two "White" magazines challenges negative stereotypes about Black women and Black bodies. In a (White)

[59] Perhaps we need to trouble the stereotyping and idealization of "fat" Black women or the idea that a "fat" body is "natural" on Black women but "unnatural" on White women which leads to this idea that slender Black women have "White" (i.e. unnatural) bodies (Ribane 2006 as an example of this stereotyping, Lovejoy 2001 questions it).

culture where beauty has been traditionally conceived of in hierarchical, antithetical terms of Black and White, this represents a significant change, not of inclusion of Black women but of transformation of White aesthetic space. For example, while waiting to begin our second interview, Astrid went into the spaza shop next door to the café where we met and bought a *Cosmo.* She told me, "The lady in there (pointing at the spaza shop) said that she has never, ever sold one of these before". In an area with a large number of young Black university students, this shop had never sold a Cosmo, which it displays on the same rack as *True Love, BONA*, and a few other "Black" women's magazines. It seems that young black women already have an inclusive magazine, and it is White women's magazines that are indeed scrambling to catch up.

Life Copying Art – Printing the Fantasy Into Being

> *"The study of representation is more limited than the study of reality, and yet it is also the study of one of the prime means by which we have any knowledge of reality.*"
>
> Richard Dyer (1997:xiii)

Part of the power in the images we see in advertising is that they do not have to reflect exactly the realities that create them, and because of this they are uniquely positioned to promote new realities. As Black women become more visible in advertising, fashion, and in popular culture in general, it is likely that mediated representations of women will continue to shift away from a rigidly White-defined beauty. Instead of swinging to an equally exclusionary Black ideal, I argue that this shift is towards a Black-identified but nonetheless more inclusive and diverse ideal that may offer White women more aesthetic freedom, if they are willing to lose a little a little of their Whiteness.

One day during the course of my research I was sitting in a waiting room thumbing through an old (2003) issue of South African Cosmo. Angelina Jolie and her famous lips were on the cover. I flipped to the centre to check out the feature fashion

spread and was struck immediately by the power of one image. The shoot featured two models, one Black and the other White, and my eye was immediately drawn to their hair. The White model had a large, springy Afro of tightly curled, shiny red hair (of the sort that White children get teased mercilessly for and spend the rest of their lives desperately trying to conquer). The Black woman wore her hair in a similar halo of kinky black curls. They knelt with their bodies facing one another, their faces turned towards the camera. Like mirror images. Like futuristic sisters. In a country where very curly hair has been constructed as a particular symbol of Blackness, and of the supposed undesirability of that Blackness, there was this photograph of these two beautiful women, the White woman with her own *White* hair and the Black woman with her own *Black* hair. The power of the image came not from any notion of *sameness* but in the *similarities* of their *difference*. It took all my willpower to not rip those pages out of the magazine and take them home to put away for the day that this particular fantasy comes true. It may not be so far away.

CHAPTER FIVE

If Class is the New Race, Is Black the New black?

> *"It could also be argued that the walls between worlds are more likely than ever to be built on money rather than a spurious notion of "race" or hierarchies based on skin colour".*
>
> Back & Ware 2002:17

Race does not matter in Johannesburg anymore.

Or so I have been told. Over and over. By young people of various ethnicities. It is not about the colour of your skin, it is about the car you drive and what kind of shoes you are wearing, and who designed your eyeglasses; and these things have no race. Access, it seems, has been thrown wide open; for those who can afford it there is nowhere they cannot go and nothing they can be denied. Show them the colour of your money and they will not notice the colour of your face. This is the new Johannesburg where class is the new race.

And a brief look at the figures may convince you this is so. The sheer speed of Black economic growth in South Africa is staggering. In a single year, between 2005 and 2006, the Black middle class grew by 30% (Southafrica.info 2007) and is poised to eclipse the White middle-class (Nuttal 2004:2). As the story goes, B.E.E. policies will soon result in a blissfully homogenous culture of conspicuous consumption in Johannesburg. Black and White women will drive the same BMW's, wear the same tailored pantsuits, carry the same Versace bags, and wear the same Prada heels. It will be a shopping-based utopia. But this line of reasoning makes several problematic assumptions. First, it assumes that the only barrier to ethnic integration is money and that once black people can purchase the symbols of middle class culture, they will put those symbols on and become middle class.[60] Second, it assumes that Black people will simply assimilate into White society as they become financially capable of doing

[60] i.e. there is nothing more to White culture than middle class consumption and nothing deeper to racism and apartheid than the cultural divides caused by class.

so, discarding ethnic identities and their aesthetic symbols at the door like a pile of last years faded fashions. Third, despite the fact that Whiteness is often conflated with a middle class identity (Ortner, 2006), it insinuates that middle class culture in South Africa is neutral and without divisive ethnic ties, and is therefore an inclusive identity. In this chapter I contrast middle class (White, neutral) consumer culture, with commodified Black culture in order to evaluate their potential to facilitate unifying, inclusive identities. I focus in particular on the ways that Black culture is instating itself in middle-class White culture in Johannesburg through the commodification of Black-associated fashion.

Colour Blind

> *"Different cultural and racial groups now mix freely, have similar attitudes and like the same products and brands"*
>
> "South Africa: Born Free"
> (Lowther 2006:np)

"Born-frees" - South Africans who grew up in a post-Apartheid South Africa[61] - are being constructed in popular discourse as a "colour blind" group of people who associate more strongly with brand names and consumer pop culture than with distinctions of "race". In October 2007, the Unilever Institute of Strategic Marketing in Cape Town published the results of a study of 3,000 seven to seventeen year olds of various ethnic identities. Based on these results, they claim that in South Africa "different cultural and racial groups now mix freely, have similar attitudes and like the same products and brands" (Lowther, 2006:np). Born-frees are described as depoliticized, ignorant about the realities of Apartheid, and unconcerned about racism (Lowther, 2006; Generation Born-Free, 2005). Several of the women I interviewed (who were only 4 or 5 years older than the oldest of these born-frees) similarly expressed in various ways that it is now class and individual choice rather

[61] Born-frees are something defined as having been born after 1989 when Nelson Mandela was released from prison, or after 1994 at official independence. Zimbabweans born after 1980 are also sometimes termed "born frees".

than race or ethnicity that determines youth identities. Hannah asserted that she "just stopped thinking about segregation" in high school.

This discourse about a colour-blind generation might reflect *a* reality, or a *potential* reality but it certainly does not reflect the current dominant reality in Johannesburg. One Mail & Guardian editor referred to this non-racialism as "the consoling myth for our anxious time" (Lowther, 2006). Despite sometimes voicing similar rhetoric, race was certainly not a non-issue for any of the women I interviewed, and according to them, many young people still live in highly segregated environments. Despite attending integrated schools, as young people enter tertiary (the most ethnically diverse environment many of them have ever been in) there is a marked *decrease* in interethnic sociality. Significantly, this trend is presented as being initiated at least partially by Black students. Astrid suggested that Whites group together to form a comfort buffer but that Black students group together because of cultural commonalities (the implication herein being that while Black people share a *culture,* Whites share a *colour* and that their identity is based on domination*)*. In contrast, Rianne understood this re-segregation as a rejecting of Whiteness and reasserting of Black identity, explaining that rural Black kids sought out township kids for their urban sophistication, while rural kids possessed the cultural capital associated with traditional knowledge and "authentic" "African culture. Thus, at tertiary (a poignant institutional symbol of middle class culture) there is a distinct trend away from non-racialism and from White culture.

The idea of a non-racial or "colour-blind" consumer society is the market equivalent of the "ethnically ambiguous" trend in modelling as well as the ANC's platform of non-racialism wherein "multi-ethnic" is quickly translated into "non-ethnic". Rather than describing a reality of non-racialism, a desire to avoid naming "race" simply reflects the power of its presence (MacDonald 2006). Far from being ethnically neutral, middle class in Johannesburg has been typically defined by middle class Whiteness. Rianne suggests that formerly, to gain access to the middle class,

Black people had to become like White people, specifically by putting on the aesthetic symbols of middle class White identity (e.g. straight hair, "White" clothing, etc.).[62] In contrast, she identifies a present cultural shift wherein middle-class and even elite status among Black youth is associated with Black cultural markers, specifically Black-associated fashion and natural hair. This new elite Black identity flies in the face of portrayals of either a rigidly White-defined wealth or a "colour-blind" consumer culture. So what does this mean for young White people? What happens to White fashion when township moves uptown? Are symbols of Black aesthetic culture becoming sufficiently divorced from "poor" and "unrefined" to draw in Whites? In the following section I will address these questions by applying a gendered analysis to Black-associated fashion in Johannesburg

Rich, Black, and Female

In addition to being infused with ethnic symbolism, Black-associated fashion in Johannesburg is an explicitly gendered form of adornment. The particular economic and culture history of Johannesburg has created a post-apartheid set of relations wherein White women are both chained to and transcendent of their "responsibility" to represent Whiteness, particularly in comparison to White men. For example, in a survey, I asked who was more likely to adopt the fashion or clothing style of an ethnic group other than their own, men or women. All of the women in both groups[63] responded that they felt it was women. If women are disproportionately under societal pressure to symbolize and reproduce ethnic identities, how is it that White women in Johannesburg are also believed to be more willing than White men to abandon, alternate, mix, and blend ethnically associated dress and adornment? A comparison between my interview group and their mothers definitely showed

[62] This point is also made by bell hooks (1992), Eugenia Kaw (1993), and Evelyn Newman-Phillip (2004), among others.
[63] Both the women I interviewed and their mothers.

generational changes in this area. Twice as many daughters as mothers reported being attracted to or wearing "ethnic" fashion.[64]

In South African fashion circles, terms like "African-inspired", "Afro-chic", "Afro-centric", "African Lifestyle Brand" and the term I find most eloquent, "Afro Urban Wear" (Stoned Cherrie) are commonly used to describe clothing brands and styles that claim some connection with Black (South) African heritage or culture. Some of the more prominent labels that claim this identity include David Tlali, Vlisco, Stoned Cherrie and Sun Goddess at the more upmarket end of things, Craig Native, Magents, and Darkie, in the middle, and Ginger Mary, Legit and Identity at the more affordable, casual end of the spectrum. Three characteristics of Black fashion in Johannesburg set it apart as unique. First, elite Black-associated fashions in Johannesburg have taken styles and symbols formerly associated with rural tribalism or "stagnant" township life and transformed them into a "high urban experience" (Nuttal 2004:439). This is no cultural safari for White folks; this is sophisticated ethnic branding. Second, unlike in other African cities where traditional African garb is worn by both men and women, and also unlike hip-hop fashion, which is largely masculine, elite Black-associated fashion in Johannesburg is largely female-oriented. Most of the well-known Black-associated labels (especially the über elite ones) cater, or have the *appearance* of catering predominantly or solely to women (e.g. Stoned Cherrie, Sun Goddess, Aziza, Sister Bucks). Thirdly, also unlike in other African cities, Black- associated fashion in Johannesburg draws on different cultural symbols for males and females. For example, the "traditional" men's fashions at Sun Goddess and Sister Bucks reflect West and East African as well as Indian and Arab influences but do not seem to incorporate many traditional South African masculine symbols. Rather, the new elite Black-associated fashion lines for men (e.g. Magents, Darkie, Loxion Kulcha) are largely defined in modern, urban (township) terms. In contrast, Stoned Cherrie's "Afro Urban Wear" consists of limited edition upmarket

[64] Many more reported being attracted to than wearing, but there was clearly a significant difference.

fashion creations for women with dress shapes that conjure up the glamorous styles of 1950's Hollywood while often incorporating fabrics and stylistic elements from the "traditional" women's dress of various South African ethnic groups.[65]

> "In our couture offering we were one of the first to successfully take what had been banished to the rural areas and put them on the ramp. We incorporated into our design aesthetic Venda prints and Shangaan inspired beadwork, the Xhosa traditional skirt, and the German print Seshweshwe, reflecting our diverse African cultural influences. Today we are refreshing timeless textiles by weaving and printing our own iconic fabrics"
>
> - From Stoned Cherrie Mission Statement

While "new", their aesthetic is not unfamiliar to affluent White women. In spring/summer 2007, Stoned Cherrie was carrying a line of blouses evocative of fashion spreads in late-70's Vogue magazine: bright jewel colours in silky shiny fabrics with neck scarves and billowy sleeves with buttoned cuffs. Stoned Cherrie designs also commonly cinch dresses and blouses high on the waist using broad tied or corseted belts that are more reminiscent of East Asian[66] or Victorian fashion than African. Stoned Cherrie designs speak to an ethnic diversity and stylistic syncretism in an *overt* and embodied way. They say, "Join us. Be part of the Rainbow Nation. Be *fabulous*". As their website states, Stoned Cherrie is "unclassifiable in terms of race or age but distinctive in terms of headspace"; the quintessential symbol for a diverse South Africa.

> "It is the mission of Sun Goddess to provide an authentic and uniquely South African luxury lifestyle experience"
>
> Mr. and Mrs. Mangalisow
> (Founders, Sun Goddess)

Elite Black women's fashion brands in particular (as opposed to the more street level Black fashion) have a class-based appeal. For example, Sun Goddess fashions are marketed with an explicit Afro-centric philosophy, but they are equally symbols of elite status and lifestyle that are only accessible to a certain class of

[65] Which are as distinctly South African as kinte cloth is Nigerian and kangas are Tanzanian.
[66] Specifically Mandarin or Japanese

women. Fashion creations from Sun Goddess are not something you would put on to walk the dog. They are *certainly* not for cooking pap and meat in. They are a lot more removed - even stylistically - from "traditional" rural African women's dress *and lifestyle* than they are removed from elite White women's dress and lifestyle. Brands like Sun Goddess are emotionally evocative and powerful because they are marketing connections to a past that never was and to a future that seems unsure and full of possibilities. In short, in the modern urban environment of Johannesburg, Afro-chic, or Afro Urban Wear is just that - a fashion, an image, something you *purchase* and *put on* - that is really no more "authentic" for Black women than for White women.

In Johannesburg, when White women put on elite Black-associated fashion, it may be the fashion of the Other, but it is not the fashion of the enemy. For White men this relationship may not be so benign. There is nothing in Black women's fashion – either high or low – that conjures up images of crime or poverty. Black men's township style, however, is more directly political and more explicitly related to symbols that recall gangsterism, tsotsis, and apartheid-era depravation. There is very little there that can be pacified as quaint rural tribalism or familiar glamour, as with women's fashion. Due to the particular symbols employed as well as the particular racialized and gendered power relations in Johannesburg, Black-associated fashion for women (and men) offers a Black-oriented identity that appeals largely to Black women, but not to Black men.

On the Outside of Blackness Looking In

> "The logo was inspired by phenomena in the philosophical world called the "dialectic"...the totality of a structure ("metaphysics") consisting of two poles that mutually and simultaneously presuppose and exclude each other. It is commonly known as the "One and the Many" spheres or the "Universal and the Particular..."
>
> Magents' Philosophy

According to Marilyn Halter, in the United States ethnic adornment is being constructed as unique, and individualistic (Halter 2000:42). She identifies this

gravitation towards ethnic chic as a reaction to the mass-produced, cookie-cutter culture that is (White) America. This rebellion against mainstream culture is also one of the reasons both Kitwana (2005) and Tanz (2007) give for the mass appeal of hip-hop to White people. In this context, adopting ethnic fashion sets a White person apart from mainstream Whiteness, which has become increasingly undesirable and uncool (Chun, 2001, La Ferla, 2003; Bucholtz & Tretcher, 2004; Kitwana, 2005; Tanz, 2006). Discussing Black culture in Johannesburg, Stephanie admitted, "I'm just so jealous of the culture. I just want to be part of that... what kind of culture do I have? Theirs is so much cooler". She acknowledged that she was obviously privileged, but then lamented "but what do I *know*? I want to be part of something *bigger*, to feel that I can *relate* (to Black people)". In Stephanie's case, this sense of White culture as empty seemed to be connected to a perception of Black culture as having substance and possessing the cultural capital of cool. Rianne also made a very interesting point when she asserted that there is a "conscious movement by Blacks in Johannesburg to reject White culture" and that the culture in general is becoming more Black-associated because "there are fewer Whites clutching to Whiteness than there are middle class Blacks rejecting Whiteness".

Because elite brands like Sun Goddess, Stoned Cherrie or Aziza are costly and carry primarily "special occasion" clothes, they function mostly as images seen on T.V., in magazines, and at the mall. For young White women in Johannesburg, it is the cheaper and more accessible street level Black-associated fashion (and the street fashion that spawned it) that offers a more everyday, adoptable image. Quite in contrast to elite brands such as Stoned Cherrie, that incorporate "traditional" South African symbols, street-level Black brands often draw on modern symbols, with direct connections to Black consciousness or liberation struggles. For example, the 1970's psychedelic Black-Is-Beautiful Afro-centrism of Truworths' Ginger Mary brand for women. While this may appear to be "ethnic bias", there is often also an emphasis on ethnic diversity that challenges racial fundamentalism. For example, Magents

Lifestyle Apparel T-shirts appear Afro-centric but in a way that is clearly intended to race jam. On their website gallery, both a Black man and an Asian woman are shown wearing a shirt that says "BROWNSKIN"[67]. Two other images are particularly striking and relevant. In the first, a White woman is shown in what is clearly a township shack sitting on a sofa between two older Black men. She is in the extreme foreground centre, her legs planted wide apart, wearing a t-shirt that says, "Decolonize your head". In the second, a White[68] woman and a Black man stand defiantly with their arms around one another. The man's hand rests on the bare skin of her waist; her t-shirt says "STAY BROWN". These images not only speak of interethnic solidarity; they offer Blackness as a malleable category. The central, unifying idea then is that *we* (being South Africans, being people) are in this *together*. The more latent idea is that there is potential unity in Blackness.

The political messages on Magents' t-shirts are commodified in such a way that should ostensibly broaden their domestic appeal. But not once in a year of living in Johannesburg have I ever seen any White person wearing a Magents t-shirt. A Magents employee informed me that a large proportion of their clientele are indeed White, but many of them are *foreigners*, specifically from Europe or America. In the West, revolutionary symbols such as Che Guevara are becoming increasingly commodified and divorced from their historical context. However, in contrast to the assertions of the born-frees, young people in South Africa have not forgotten the past, because *history lives in the present*.

The explicit Blackness of black fashion is undoubtedly understood by many Whites to be exclusionary. A feeling that they "don't have the right" to wear Black-associated fashion was certainly present among the women I interviewed. For example, Rianne admitted, "I would look like a bit of a poser if I wore something too African but I try to integrate it as much as I can". She added that it was not just her

[67] A shirt which I was informed they are constantly selling out of at the Magents at Rosebank Mall.
[68] Or perhaps "E.A.". The model could easily have been East Indian.

Whiteness but also her *South Africanness* that constrained her choices, explaining that "more 'hybrid' White people can pull it off". For example, her cousin had gone to an international school in Swaziland where there were "lots of Africans"[69] and "she could get away with wearing blatantly Afro-centric T-shirts without looking silly". Rianne felt the South African Whites have held themselves so aloof from Blacks that to wear Black symbols would be gauche. Joanne has a "hybrid" friend from Botswana who wears Craig Native and Sun Goddess items and people say she "dresses like a Black girl". Joanne explained, "She wears beads and things on her head; she doesn't look Black, but that style comes through". As for the more everyday Black fashion she also admitted, "you might see something stylish on a Black girl, but as a White girl you feel you cannot carry it off". Similarly, Stephanie expressed an attraction to Afro-centric street-fashion styles but she was too scared to wear them because she felt that Black women would look at her and think she had no right to those symbols, that they were not *hers* to wear.

In order to evaluate this perception that Black women would be hostile or dismissive towards White women who were trying to rock an Afro-centric or Black-associated look, I sometimes used myself as a fashion-fusion guinea pig and went into the field as an ethnic cross-dresser. I would incorporate some aspect of Black-associated or African fashion into my outfit and walk around the mall, noting people's reactions to me. Sometimes I wore long dresses made from Tanzanian kitenge and wrapped my head in the same cloth. On other occasions I wore outfits that were "Black-associated" by the mere fact that they consisted of styles, cuts, and colours found predominantly in Black-associated shops (e.g. Identity, Truworths, Legit). In my own experience, White women, especially older White women would openly stare at me, but they never once greeted me or made any sort of comment, and rarely returned my smile. In contrast, on a number of occasions, young Black women approached me specifically to comment on or ask questions about the way I was

[69] i.e. Black people from outside of South Africa.

dressed, and once, a woman my mother's age approached me to compliment my outfit and to advise me how to apply decorative make-up dots to my face in the proper local way. Based on observations I made over a year's stay in Johannesburg, I would say that the disapproval coming from White women is possibly higher than that coming from Black women. Thus, consider that a loss of "proper" White identity is likely *as* if not *more* significant a factor in maintaining different styles for White and Black women than any reality of Black hostility.

Once You Go Black....

"I love colour. Colour! Colour! Colour!"
Naomi

In some cases, it appeared that colour itself was a Black symbol, as discussions of colour (or its absence) was significant in each interview. Amanda focused particularly on her embracing of colorful clothes as a way of defiantly re-claiming her personality from judgmental women. There is a certain exuberance to Black-associated fashion – the colours that are not afraid to be colours, bold cuts that accentuate rounded female forms – that is life-affirming in a way that is somewhat antithetical to the colorless, cold, even morbid tone of much "alternative" or trendy White-associated fashion (which is often accentuated by draping them over scowling or vacant-eyed, anemic waifs in magazines). If, as Naomi suggests, wearing a lot of colour denotes a "different" White identity, it is entirely possible that the reason this is so risqué for girls like Hannah and Amanda is that it does not denote a White identity at all.

Naomi arrived at our first meeting at an upmarket café, wearing a bright red hat and red eyeglasses, with a matching red sports top sticking out from under a baggy white t-shirt. Her eyeglasses, as it turns out, are from Stoned Cherrie's new line.

> "Sometimes I walk into Stoned Cherrie and it's like cultural acquisition, like "township" art at spaza shops.... I'm a White woman in South Africa but I'm not

> trying to take your culture. It's borderline. It's got an African influence but in an accepting way".

She then went on to suggest that a White woman wearing Stoned Cherrie is more an embracing of their own Africanness than an appropriation of someone else's style. Naomi sometimes wraps her head in bright scarves and she said her boyfriend tells her it makes her look "like a sweet". She also wears bright coloured "sporties", Black men's township hats. When I ask her if she think that she looks like a typical White woman she answers "No, not half the time", but is quick to add, "But I don't look like a Black person. I am still defined under White". I am reminded that earlier when I had asked her if Black people are influencing White fashion in Johannesburg she had responded that "if there is a Black-to-White influence, White people would deny it".

A Different Kind of Manufactured Desire

The marketing of Black-associated fashion as highly elite symbols of a new, proud, hip Black culture, and the widespread availability of more casual, affordable Black-associated clothes at shops such as Truworths and Legit are clearly having an impact on how white women view these fashions and the degree to which they will feel the desire or ability to wear them. Four out of the ten women I interviewed admitted that as much as they wished to believe they had individual styles, what they wore was also influenced simply by what was in the shops. When asked the survey question "Does South Africa have it's own fashion style?" less than half of the mother's thought so versus almost all of the daughters, all of whom had mentioned Stoned Cherry and Sun Goddess specifically during interviews. Rianne implied that before Black-associated fashion was commodified, there was no uniquely South African style, and Naomi characterized White South African fashion as "European fashion six months later".[70]

[70] E.g, the "bubble" skirt which in spring (August and September) 2007 could be found in many upscale women's shops in Johannesburg was already listed as a passé fashion "DON'T" in the June 2007 edition of American Vogue.

In addition to increasingly defining uniquely South African fashion, Black-associated fashion is apparently also exacerbating a sort of self-conscious consumption among White women. Ribane (2006) describes how under Apartheid, Black people in Johannesburg were not allowed to own property and so they invested their money into looking good, resulting in a highly fashion-oriented township culture. In a society that disparaged Black beauty, a heightened focus on Black beauty and fashion was not only political, but "doing looks" was also a source of personal power (Frost, 1999). Interestingly, Naomi opined that in fact to some extent the culture of vulgar conspicuous consumption in Johannesburg has been at least partially a *reaction* to Black economic empowerment. She pointed to the degree to which looking good is important to people in the Black community and asserted that they will spend money they do not really have to create appearances. Because of this, Whites, in order to maintain a *higher* class profile, are also going into debt to "keep up with Blacks".

Race Matters

"Race" does matter in Johannesburg. It matters a lot. But it is beginning to matter in such a new way that White people are not sure where they fit into it anymore, and within this new popular discourse of non-racialism, they are not sure what to call it. Class has not become the new race; class and race are simply shifting meanings and pushing each other around. Rather than seeing this process as Black people being assimilated into the White middle class, which is not *at all* "colour-blind", I would suggest that it is the Black middle class who is redefining middle-classness. Like Mary's dreadlocks, like hip-hop, like Naomi wearing sporties, White use/appropriation/adoption of Black aesthetic symbols is often connected (somewhat paradoxically) to their power as subversive symbols, while at the same time denying or downplaying the ethnic identity from which their subversive power stems

(Kitwana, 2005; Trevor-Roper, 1983). But the denial of a connection does not erase that connection – not in the eyes of others and not in effect. It is not a coincidence that having a diverse circle of friends does not appear to be an indicator of White women adopting Black fashion, but dating Black men does. And it is not insignificant that White people seem a lot more resistant to this cultural syncretism than Black people. Being "down" with Black fashion to some extent is a symbol of being "down" with black people, and herein lays the tension. White kids are starting, slowly, slowly, to "be down" with Black fashion, and that is a threat –however small it may be – to the cultural hegemony of Whiteness.

When "Black" was a distant and disempowered Other – thought coarse and dangerous at worst, and quaintly tribal at best - White people in South Africa had virtual freedom to unselfconsciously acquire, display, and wear "authentic" "traditional" African art, jewellery and clothing. Who possessed the power to challenge the interpretation, much less assert ideas about history and meaning? In *The Glow of White Women*, Yunis Vally interviews a recent Mrs. South Africa about her choice to wear a "traditional Zulu" dress to the contest ceremonies. In between talking about the used clothing and alcohol she generously doles out to her "African" farm workers, she gushed that she was "proudly South African" and that she loved "to look fabulous". A murmur of protest went up in the theatre. I thought someone might throw something at the screen. Black culture is drawing too close for uncomplicated appropriation or parody. In Johannesburg, despite this talk about a de-racialized, de-politicized youth, Black cultural symbols are being powerfully reclaimed, *named*, and performed through Black-associated fashion. This new brand of "traditional" South African style – this fusion of motherland and homeland, township and uptown, Sandton and Sophiatown, though commodified and altered, are not being *stripped* of their meaning. Black hijacking of *the* White cultural symbol – middle-classness – has not de-racialized class, it has multi-racialized it by positing itself as an inclusive ethnicity through self-commodification.

CHAPTER SIX

Is There Room for White in the Rainbow (Nation)?

> "We cannot find our (beauty) icons because we are not comfortable deciding on what it means to be South African and what South African beauty is now. The older generation is SURE because they KNOW what is attractive because it was rigidly constructed for them. But we don't know; is it Black or White?"
>
> Hannah

> "To be black was not to be African and was not even to be conscious of being African. It was to achieve a specific consciousness, a particular sensitivity about race and power"
>
> MacDonald (2006:120)

Is there space for Whiteness, especially an unself-critical Whiteness in a city that is increasingly Black identified? In the post-Apartheid era, White South Africans' claim to autochthonous African identity has lost much of its authority, as have many of the illusionary positive images of Whiteness that existed under Apartheid. In such a politically charged environment of identity impoverishment, a new identity is potentially becoming available to White people, but the problem is that the identity being offered is in some ways....Black, and removing it from associations with poverty and ugliness has not changed that. Even when commodified, Black-associated fashion does not cease to be Black and perhaps even takes on heightened political connotations. The prediction that black people (and with them Black cultural symbols) will be assimilated into White middle-class culture in Johannesburg is, I think, not only premature, but also misguided. In Johannesburg, there is no room for black people to insert themselves into White culture and still be Black, as White culture by definition is *not* Black. Yet there is no way for black people living within White environments to be anything *but* Black. The inconsequence of "race" could only be possible if White supremacist racism did not exist, and in Johannesburg (and mostly everywhere), it is alive and well. As a local radio host told me one day while he was showing me around Johannesburg, "in South Africa we're holding hands, yeah, but we're not touching". I suggest then that rather than appropriation or rejection,

what is happening in Johannesburg is a slow melding, a blurring of the cultural lines. By becoming common, by being insinuated into the White environment through the media, and the presence of black people; black bodies, Black beauty, and Black fashion are becoming normalized and acceptable, adoptable, without necessarily becoming White.

Despite the tenacity of an exclusionary, elitist, largely unattainable White feminine ideal, beauty in Johannesburg is indeed on a massive paradigm shift. And while government policies (i.e. B.E.E.) and changes in marketing strategies are definitely a factor in these processes of change, they are just as solidly based in the cultural influence of Black people. Black beauty and Black fashion as cultural symbols have not come into being because White people are beginning to *see* them, or to *buy* them, or worse, because White people have *created* them. Sporties were hip loxion kulcha in the townships before they were expensive Loxion Kulcha™ in the shops. The significance of Black women (and men) embracing Black-associated aesthetics should not be underestimated in a country where Black beauty has for so long been denigrated and denied. If the (former?) colonizer needs the colonized to "corroborate him in his search for self-validation" (Magubane 2004:133); if the anthropological Other simply functions as a mirror for White people to look at themselves (Ahmed, 2004) then the impact of a culturally powerful Black majority population should not be underestimated.

Black people are appearing more and more often in advertisements and magazines aimed at a "mainstream" (White) demographic, and "South African" fashion is increasingly becoming identified specifically with Black designers, labels, and shops. Popular culture – as with popular culture in the United States, is increasingly being identified as Black. And while the manifestations may be subtle, it seems that new, alternative, Black-associated conceptions of feminine beauty are beginning to be claimed by young White women. In his film, Yunis Vally (2007) expressed that the exciting possibilities for inter-racial relationships (as a location of

inter-racial dialogue and alliance) that existed during the struggle "fizzled out" with Apartheid, and he bitterly describes post-apartheid Johannesburg as a "trivial, empty, frigid (city) full of pissed-off madams". In contrast to this picture, one of the most evident findings of my research was that there appears to be a definitive link between White women embracing Black aesthetic values and those women dating Black men. This is unsurprising taking into consideration the degree to which attracting a partner seemed to figure in White women's aesthetic constructions, and the degree to which White masculinity is being globally posited as "uncool". Nonetheless, as much as this trend could be seen as another form of exotification of the Other or as another form of culture-vulturing (the latest accessory – a Black man!), the rush (from both "sides") to dismiss the cultural relevance of inter-racial relationships speaks to their potential to, as Naomi phrased it, be "a facination that turns into something real". It is also likely no co-incidence that I consistently saw more inter-ethnic couples at Rosebank Mall/The Zone – a place of melding ethnic identities - than anywhere else in the city.

During my third day in the field I was sitting at the Nescafe café at the main entrance to the Rosebank Mall, people-watching. First, a blonde White woman walked by wearing a Ginger Mary T-shirt. It was brown and earthy yellow with an outline of a woman with an Afro on the front and it said "University of Africa, School of our Ancestors". Less than an hour later a young Black woman walked by wearing a bright green t-shirt that said "Kiss Me, I'm Irish". While this was the last time I observed an overt example of race jamming in Johannesburg, it still sticks in my mind as a symbol of hope, not that "race" will disappear, but a hope that as the Black majority becomes increasingly the definers of culture, that the culture they create is as inclusive and syncretic as it appears that it could be from this point in history. How White people fit into and contribute to this culture that is being created depends entirely on whether they embrace their own Blackness and join in, or they hold onto their Whiteness until

they are standing alone in a barren wilderness holding onto something that seems suddenly empty and without colour.

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