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The Megatext: Towards a Literary Theory of the Media

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DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature:

Signed by candidate

Date:

03/02/2005

ABSTRACT

“The Megatext: Towards a Literary Theory of the Media” argues for a new conception of the media landscape; one that manages to critically engage the mass dimensions of the contemporary phenomenon of media without losing the value of particular socio-economic and cultorological approaches that have been established in the field thus far. Initially, the thesis reviews current approaches to media studies, including structural, sociological and philosophical approaches. Then, through a technique of descriptive observation gleaned from practical experience in the media field, a current snapshot of the contemporary media landscape is offered, with key defining characteristics outlined, which are used to categorise various instances of media into what is termed “the media matrix”. Thereafter, with the aim of developing a theoretical approach that is conceptually large enough to assess the media as a broadly textual phenomenon, literary theories of textuality and inter-textuality are discussed in the framework of contemporary media production and consumption patterns and applied to the common media text. Once it has been established that the myriad of media texts that exist are indeed connected in a variety of inter-textual ways, an in-depth discussion of the various contextual, or supra-textual, realities that unite media into the megatext are discussed. This discussion largely deals with issues of authorship and readership and also draws on literary theories dealing with the same. Finally, the thesis concludes by offering a definition of the megatext, a definition that it is argued could form the basis for further theoretical, textual and literary explorations of the contemporary phenomenon of mass media.

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Cape Town, January 2005.

University of Cape Town

"I demand the sum of ... ONE MILLION DOLLARS."
Dr Evil, after announcing that he has stolen a nuclear weapon and is holding the world to ransom.
Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery, 1997

Chapter 1

One Million: The Massive Singularity of Mega

Back in the 1960s when Dr Evil and Austin Powers were first "cryogenically frozen", one million dollars was a lot of money. But by the time that the hero and anti-hero of the popular 1997 spoof spy film *Austin Powers* were defrosted three decades later, one million dollars was such a laughable figure that the group of evildoers whom Dr Evil had hoped to impress and cow with his outrageous ransom demand merely glanced sideways at one another and chuckled nervously, unsure of how to break the news to their notorious, but outdated, colleague. Once Dr Evil learnt that inflation had decreased his expected ransom earnings to mere pocket change, significantly less than the value of the nuclear weapon that he had stolen, less, indeed, than the production costs of the film in which he starred, he quickly revised his ransom demand to "one hundred billion dollars" both to save face and, clearly, to cover the no doubt immense costs of trying to blow up the planet.

This anecdote from the least academic of texts is as useful a starting point for this thesis as it is entertaining because it betrays two things. The first is a reminder of how broad and diverse the definition of text has become, something that will be covered in more detail later in this thesis, mainly with a view to linking understandings of "the text" and "the media". Indeed, most media analysts would agree that a film like *Austin Powers* is theoretically a text that can be analysed in a variety of ways, and although analyses such as these are not what interest me, the point that a media artefact like this is accepted as such is crucial. The second thing that is betrayed by Dr Evil's *faux pas* is illustrative of the claim to a "megatext" that I make in the title of this thesis, the main aim of which is to argue for the validity and necessity for such a term in the study of media. The dictionary definition of the prefix mega is "ten to the power of six", or one million. This prefix is used to "supersize", to

borrow the term from McDonalds, or amplify, words, thereby emphasising the grand aspect of the phenomenon under description. My intention with the term “text” is no different; I hope to argue that collectively, the media can be considered a massive text, a megalith of contemporary literature as such. That media can be compared to a body of contemporary literature is not a new idea; it does not take much time to observe the fact that the media is a collection of texts. What is radical about calling media a literature is the fact that this conflates “high” texts to the common “low” texts that we associate with the media, which has, depressingly, often been hailed as the death of literature due to its questionable quality of writing and, more often than not, shallow engagement with the issues covered. But a literature it is nevertheless, an assumption that, in large part, this thesis is based on. The concept of the megatext for which I shall argue is based very much on this redefinition of literature. But before I go about trying to argue for this, it is important to remember that mega, one million, is not as impressive as it used to be.

In today’s number ruled society one million is no longer regarded as the ultimate in greatness, or the most that could be conceived of by the human mind. The most effective way of discussing figures is in monetary terms, and while, of course, no one would turn down a million dollars or rands, indeed, we’d happily accept it, we have probably forgotten how quickly we’d spend it. A couple of brand new cars or a modest house in one of the finer suburbs and the million would be *kaput*, we’d be left with nothing to pay for the cost of upkeep. We play the lotto hoping to win ten or twenty million rands, we read of business deals that cruise into the billions, we talk of hundreds of millions every day. We know that the population of the world is well over six billion. One million has become a number that we can access and understand. It really isn’t that much, in the bigger picture.¹

¹ Seeing as this in an introduction of entertaining asides, it may be worth mentioning, in the spirit of Mike Myers, a delicious piece of synchronicity that occurred as I wrote this. Getting up from my desk for a break and to stretch, I jokingly asked a colleague in the office in which I was working how much I would have to pay her to write the rest of my thesis for me. She paused, thought about it for a couple of seconds, and then said, “A million rands”. Talk is, indeed, cheap.

The South African national lottery claims that it has created 373 new South African millionaires since its launch in 2000. (www.casinocity.com). Mark Shuttleworth, it-boy of the South African Information Technology industry, who became a billionaire in rand terms when he sold his company Thawte for \$600 million in 2000, gave every single Thawte employee, down to the janitor and the tea lady, a million rands each to celebrate the prosperous deal. Out of a global population of over six and a half billion people, there are about 7.7 million millionaires in the world, who share assets of about \$28.7 trillion. The wealthiest person in the world (Bill Gates) is worth about \$46.6 billion (www.rediff.com). The point here is not to highlight economic discrepancies between the rich and the poor or our contemporary culture of greed but, in the context of the term “mega”, to remind the reader that a million, in a world in which we have been educated into an endlessly exploding mentality of “more is more”, is not that much at all. As a society, we’ve lost sight of all the zeros. Consider the following simple table, which helps to track the zeros, and note how modest “mega” appears:

10 = ten
100 = one hundred
1 000 = one thousand
100 000 = one hundred thousand
1 000 000 = one million (mega)
10 000 000 = ten million
100 000 000 = one hundred million
1 000 000 000 = one billion
10 000 000 000 = ten billion
100 000 000 000 = one hundred billion
1 000 000 000 000 = one trillion

The term “megatext” then, does not suggest some kind of infinite system of signs that has no boundaries, no delineating circumstances and no appropriate analytical tools, it simply implies something that is at once bigger than we thought it was and is fairly modest considering how massive and multiplied things have become in contemporary society. It also does not connote the conflation of many things that have no relation to one another; another criticism that the term “megatext” may invite. In this thesis I hope to describe the various inter-textual and supra-textual qualities that unite various

media texts into what I term the “megatext”, links that are not incongruent with the system of signs in which the media and texts already operate. In the same way that the mathematical understanding of mega is “ 10^6 ” ($10 \times 10 \times 10 \times 10 \times 10 \times 10$; ten to the *power* of six), a similar logic unites the “megatext”; a logic of power with exponential qualities, the latter particularly evident with the boom in new media. The term suggests, on one level, the existence of a million texts that are all somehow connected or a text with a million texts within it. And although we may catch our collective breath faced with the potentially ludicrous suggestion that any single text could be so large, it is important to remember that a mere six zeroes are not that many in a world in which zeroes multiply at exponential speed. This dissertation will attempt to show how, in the media, texts multiply at an equally exponential speed and how it is simply not good enough for us to continue to approach the study of media in an environment such as this, with the contemplative, careful, tunnelling vision that we reserve for the study of traditional literary texts. We’ve got to keep up with the megatext or we risk being left behind.

Another very important idea that Dr Evil has helped to introduce, and one that saturates this entire dissertation, is the problem of the plural. Is one million a singular or a plural? This is a grammatical issue perhaps, but one that implies deeper conceptual ruptures. In many ways, the idea of a million has been accepted as a massive singular, unified both by its mathematical structure and its popular acceptance by society as a financial and numerical concept. Of course, the answer is not that a million is either singular or plural but that it is simultaneously singular and plural, in much the same way that we might agree that a “pack of wolves” is both singular (a pack of) and plural (wolves). This co-existent quality of the million is something that I will argue applies to the concept of “megatext” and therefore also to the concept of media. “Media”, after all, is also a term that can be used in both the plural and the singular. An understanding of the media as a megatext could, perhaps, perform the function of knitting the millions of instances of media into a massive singular (acting perhaps, as the pack would to the wolves), something that will

undoubtedly add new nuances to understandings of the mass phenomenon (a) that media is (are).

At this point I should admit that the term megatext, or to be more specific, “mega-text” has been coined and used before. My surprise gave way to pleasure when I realised that Damien Broderick’s positing of the term “mega-text” in his definition and analysis of post-modern science-fiction (or “sf” as insiders affectionately and cryptically term it) is something with which Austin Powers and Dr Evil would have been prepared, even proud, to associate, having been cryogenically frozen themselves. Broderick’s 1995 book *Reading by Starlight: Postmodern Science Fiction* defines sf as follows:

Sf is that species of storytelling native to a culture undergoing the epistemic changes implicated in the rise and supersession of technical-industrial modes of production, distribution, consumption and disposal. It is marked by (i) metaphoric strategies and metonymic tactics, (ii) the foregrounding of icons and interpretative schemata from a collectively constituted generic ‘mega-text’ and the concomitant de-emphasis of ‘fine writing’ and characterisation, and (iii) certain priorities more often found in scientific and postmodern texts than in literary models: specifically, attention to the object in preference to the subject. (155)

Without diverting the discussion too far into the starry skies of sf (who knows if we might return?) or attempting a premature definition of my megatext at this early stage of the thesis, it is worth briefly discussing Broderick’s “mega-text” in order to make it clear that his use of the term was not ignored in the development of my own version of it. I will avoid assessing in detail any points of intersection or divergence, as I think that the in-depth discussions of approaches to media studies, literary theory that may be applicable to media, and ideas of media inter- and supra-textuality that follow will suffice in communicating the dimensions of my megatext and make it clear that the two approaches to the term are neither too contradictory nor too similar to share theoretical space. Broderick himself adopted his use of the term “mega-text” from Christine Brooke-Rose’s 1981 analysis of fantastic literatures (Broderick, 1995:160). He applies it to sf in order to demonstrate that “sf is explicitly a

communal narrative form” (156). The sf mega-text is a “vast intertextual hyper-text: part encyclopaedia of knowledge drawn from current scientific data and theories, part iconography established in previous sf, part generic repertoire of standard narrative moves, their probability-weighted variants, and their procedures for generating new moves” (67-68). Sf writers and readers, therefore, rely on this genre code in order to encode and decode their texts. The sf mega-text is a “pool of common property” (59) of terms and icons that are used and understood, by all who enter the sf textual fray, as “narrative archetypes” (60) – terms such as “robot” and “artificial intelligence” (59). Broderick’s mega-text then is both a super- and a sub-structure of an immense genre of literary fiction, and it is crucial that one engage with it actively should one wish to write or read sf texts.

The definition of media as megatext that I will discuss throughout this thesis is similar in that it also alludes to a pool of “common property” and an immense inter-textuality that exists between media. Common narrative archetypes and a de-emphasis on fine writing can also be attributed to various media texts, making Broderick’s definition of sf easily transposable to media. But over and above these inter-textual elements of sf as mega-text and media as megatext, there exists, I will argue, a host of supra-textual issues which further “knit the megatext” and which offer an additional level of analysis from which we can view the media. While there are similarities between the two uses of the term, I think that this thesis will make clear that media as megatext is a reasonably new theoretical conception within which we can analyse media.

My route to a specifically media oriented definition of megatext is structured as follows: Chapter 2 maps a broad overview of current approaches to media studies; Chapter 3 describes the current reality of the multiplicity of media texts; Chapter 4 describes the inter-textual links of these concurrent media texts and explores and applies literary theories of inter-textuality to the matrix of media described in Chapter 3; and Chapter 5 describes and assesses the over-arching contextual forces at play in shaping media as a contemporary

phenomenon. Finally, Chapter 6 pulls together the various levels of analysis covered in the preceding chapters into a preliminary definition of the media megatext.

The discussion in this dissertation is made up of a combination of practical observation and theoretical exploration. Aside from Chapter 2, which is largely a literature review, my arguments are based on a need to source the theoretical roots of what are easily observable, practical realities about the media. It is not difficult to observe that many media texts exist, for example, nor that they are linked in many ways. It is exactly this ease with which we are able to observe media phenomena that should call into question the tools with which we analyse them. As discussed earlier, for the purposes of this paper, media should be understood as a literature of the times in which we live, making it worthwhile attempting to understand the meaning of these observed facts in the framework of some literary theories.

At this point, it is important that I make a note on the methodology of the examples chosen for the Appendices. I have deliberately chosen only a limited number of practical examples from the media. The point of these examples is not to demonstrate my arguments empirically, e.g. that because so many newspaper articles rely on the use of many sources all newspaper articles exhibit an internal heteroglossia, or that, because the covers of women's magazines are largely generic and interchangeable, they draw from a consumerist philosophy animating most media, but rather to show that examples that demonstrate the observations offered throughout this dissertation are readily available and can be accessed by simply dipping into any instance of media on hand. In other words, the Appendices are not meant to prove my observations, but to show how common are the scenarios being observed.

Much of the descriptive argument in Chapters 3 and 4 consists of observations gleaned from my own practical experience in working in the field

of media. It is precisely these practical observations that need to be rooted through theories of text, readership and authorship, ideas central to any practical experience of media. In particular, literary theory is used in support of demonstrating the inter-textuality of media. But this is not in itself enough to convince the reader of the media as a megatext. Chapter 5 therefore assesses the various extra-textual (rather than extra-terrestrial, as Broderick may have it) issues that impact on media's textualities; issues that are largely questions of authorship.

The megatext, therefore, although largely a literary construct applied to the media, is also inescapably a social, economic and political construct (as all texts necessarily are too). The introduction of the literary into the social, economic and political paradigm that already defines the study of media, as the next chapter will show is, in my opinion, where the real value of this thesis, in its entirety, lies.

"[The study of media needs] theoretical tools abstract enough to make a place for the theory of mass media within a general theory of modern society."
Niklas Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media* (8)

Chapter 2

Mapping Media Studies: Current Approaches to Media Analysis

Considering the broad diversity of both the academic approach to and the subject matter of the media, it is prudent to begin by structuring a literary review in terms of the three overarching manifestations of media: the media products (objects) themselves, the producers of the media products and the audience-consumers of the media products. It makes sense, therefore, for the discussion that will follow to address each of these aspects in turn.

What I hope to achieve in this review of current approaches to media is not so much identify a gap that I intend to fill but rather to identify threads that will support the potential development of a theory of media that will in turn, suggest a movement towards what I have termed, in the title, "a literary theory of the media". I hope that my argument will demonstrate firstly that a literary criticism of the media is not some kind of new-fangled, baseless, radical approach to the study of mass communication (literary approaches to media are in fact common and still employed in the field of study) and secondly that such a literary-criticism approach may have the potential to provide an additional and alternative baseline to the approaches that will be covered in the literary review to follow, from which we can perhaps develop a critical and constructive reassessment of our of the study of media. Before we review the broad diversity of approaches to media, however, it is important to assess out the need for definitions.

It is one of the primary aims of this paper to allow possible definitions to emerge as conclusions rather than to try to base conclusions upon definitions, even though they are offered where appropriate. In a field so fraught with theoretical difficulty, practical discrepancy and conflicting interpretation, it

would be irresponsible of me to attempt to pin down neat and clear definitions at the beginning of this paper. Rather, I intend to aim towards some useful and valuable *concluding definitions* through a process of reflexive discussion of the various, sometimes conflicting, definitions that exist. It is for this reason that I will avoid a “definitions” section at this point and rather allow the discussion of the many definitions that do exist to take me in the direction of what I hope will be useful conclusions.

Study of the mass media, or mass communications as it is also known, has become a broad and overlapping discipline, one that is perhaps better termed an “interdiscipline” that dates back to the 1920s (Valdivia, 2003:3). Its keenest aspect is the fact that it is difficult to draw neat and clear boundaries around it; media studies is a broad and very diverse field that overlaps with many other disciplines, making it both difficult to categorise and exhausting to document; it is, indeed, a field “fraught with difficulty” (Valdivia, 2003:3).

Valdivia goes on to point out that “it draws on some of the more established disciplines both in the humanities and social sciences such as history, political science, sociology, psychology, anthropology, linguistics and literature. Media studies also has great overlaps with newer disciplines such as cultural studies, popular cultural studies, film studies, ... journalism, communications, speech communications, education and ethnomusicology, to name a few” (2003:3). If this is the case, and a mere cursory observation of the *status quo* of media confirms that it is, then it is all the more understandable why I have chosen to avoid the trap of trying to draw a neat and clean definitive line around some of the terms that will be in common use in this paper, when media studies is itself such a broad multidisciplinary field. After all, how can one draw boundaries around something without boundaries?

It is also crucial to note that this thesis will not presume to offer an exhaustive review of the history of media studies and of every approach to it, simply because its scope is necessarily limited. I will however, attempt to offer a

broad overview of approaches to media studies that I consider relevant to my suggestion of the term “megatext” as useful in an analysis of the media. This broad overview will act as an introduction to the field and its key variables and will demonstrate the usefulness of the approach that I hope to develop towards media.

At this point it may be important to distinguish between communication science and media studies. Crucially, mass media are distinguished by the fact that they exist at the confluence of technology and culture. Communication science on the other hand, does not necessarily include the use of technology – scholars using communication science tools could just as well analyse a conversation between two people at a party as they could a satellite broadcast from space. A crucial delineator of media studies therefore, is the involvement of some kind of technology. Although all media are types of communication, not all communications are types of media.

Media Products

The term media was first widely used around 1920, by advertising agencies “who began to describe newspapers, magazines, and radio as media,” in other words, “anything in which you might place an ad” (Nerone, 2003:99). The academic fraternity used the term in only a slightly more complex way; “Malcolm Wiley memorably terms media ‘instruments of mass impression’, which used to be, and often still are, called ‘the press’” (Nerone, 2003:100). This is the sense in which the term has become an obvious one in contemporary culture – when we refer to the media it is broadly understood as an umbrella term for all print, broadcast and digital technologies that communicate information of various genres to the broader public.

Before the term was popularised and normalised in this way, referring to mass communication organisations and channels, “media” or a “medium” could refer to any material or channel that was used for communication – be it two tin cans and a piece of string, a sophisticated satellite telephone or an artist’s

paint and canvas. A medium is therefore, according to my dictionary, an “intervening means, instrument or agency”. According to this understanding then, the term media “implies some form of mediated communications” (Valdivia, 2003:2). While a definition such as this may seem simplistic, it is in fact crucial in order to lay the foundation for the discussion that will follow. Media can therefore be understood as both the actual organisations that produce the mass media as we know it, and as intervening agencies that offer mediated forms of information.

It is also important to understand that media can refer to two different things. “One usage refers to the material or technology used to communicate (paper, radio waves, the spoken word, reflecting the usage of artists, engineers, etc), in other words media/technology, the second refers to the organisations that produce media of mass communication, i.e. newspapers, magazines and radio stations, among other media-institutions” (Nerone, 2003:96).

Mass media, the manifestations of communicative effort using technology, are studied largely as a result of the presence of technology in their production. Traditional mass media include newspaper, magazine, film, radio and television, as well as new “digital options ... [i]nternet deployment; digital cameras, scanners, and video recorders; palm pilots and cellular telephony and internet access; DVD movies; biometric body scanning; and all of the overlapping and synergistic possibilities between these media ...” (Valdivia, 2003:2). There is also no doubt that the speed of technological development has had an impact on media analysis (Valdivia, 2003:4).

Media, therefore, can be understood as both technology products and the products of technology. I am less interested in the former, which are often simply desirable high-tech gadgets like digital cameras and fancy cell phones, than I am in the latter, which are technology mediated communication texts and artefacts. I will discuss the various types of media products that exist in Chapter 3, “The Media Matrix: The Multiplicity of Media as Text”, where I will

also attempt to map as broadly as possible, the various “types” of media that exist in order to provide a snapshot of the current media landscape. Suffice it to say at present that when I refer to media, I refer to a large collection of technological communication artefacts produced in order to facilitate the transmission of a wide variety of information. Of course, all technology is in human hands (Valdivia, 2003:8), which is why it is impossible to study the technology products without an analysis of the human role in producing, consuming, using and even abusing those technologies.

Of course, there are various approaches to the study of media, and a neat and fairly simple (and therefore probably easily contestable) way in which one could “nutshell” these approaches would be to generalise, and point out that, in general, “political and economic approaches have focused on the concentration of ownership and production” of media (Valdivia, 2003:8) whilst the content of media has generally been approached from a social-scientific perspective (Valdivia, 2003:9). Generalising can be as useful as it is dangerous, and in this respect, observations such as these are helpful for providing some kind of starting block for further discussion. It is also crucial to remember that simplistic separations such as this are useful in analysis only and that “it is inconceivable to separate the political and economic from the cultural” (Valdivia, 2003:6). “Categories of media have to be studied separately even though we experience them simultaneously” (Valdivia, 2003:7).

John Nerone argues that it was the age of the industrial revolution that fixed the technological and economic forms of the modern media and it was the age of political revolution that fixed the *idea* of media (2003:103).

The age of industrialisation marked the key moment for the formation of the organisations that we now think of as the mass media. Industrialisation also created the characteristic audiences of the media. Although the media claim to transcend or even erase class boundaries, the fact is that the specific media that advanced mass distribution all began by appealing to the working classes, and by the same token were all opposed by the traditional moral guardians of the middle classes (102).

The invention of the printing press is the iconoclastic moment in which information became freely available to the middle and lower classes. More than an icon of mass produced communication, the printing press was also the first tool of mass production: “print workplaces divided and routinised production long before Ford’s assembly line” (Nerone, 2003:101). Paying attention to the construction of media tools therefore (rather than their ontology or phenomenology) means paying attention to markets and industries. It is, after all the system of production and exchange that helped to define the media as we know it today.

Journalism, says Nerone, became the “literature of the masses and its mission was to afflict the comfortable while comforting the afflicted”; acting as mediator between the political and the economic spheres and translating market success into an ability to provide a platform for political deliberation (103). An idealistic, and therefore easily disappointed, conception of the newly massed media was that it would act as a tool for mass enlightenment and empowerment – instead de Tocqueville credits the American media with amplifying the “tyranny of the majority” in *Democracy in America* and John Stuart Mill condemns the culture of “mediocrity” that results from the improvements in communication, transportation and mass education in *On Liberty*. Nerone further points out a deep irony in this self-constructed industrial-age model of the media: “it simultaneously reflected a class structure and obscured it” (102). Nevertheless, “the early vision of the media was that it should and could operate as transparent information resources, on the one hand, and as neutral, active champions of the people on the other” (104). In order for it to fulfil these roles it was expected to be free and to fight for its freedom – hence the beginnings of arguments for the freedom of the press as early as Milton’s *Aeropagitica*, a “speech for the liberty of unlicensed printing” which argued for the “liberty to know, to utter and to argue freely according to conscience above all liberties” (Milton, 1991: 268).

At this point it may be useful to discuss other broad approaches to communication theory, before going on to describe current approaches to ideas of media production and consumption. Denis McQuail's 2003 précis of the three pillars of communications theory are particularly useful in this respect.

McQuail argues that communication science (and he uses this term interchangeably with "media studies") is fragmented and vulnerable due to competition between new and old intellectual traditions (essentially the modernist post-modernist divide), the diversity of academic approaches ranging from quantitative social science to literary theory and the enormous diversity of communication phenomena. This has, he continues, led to a loss of a clear tradition of critical theory, a diminished social commitment, and a lack of ethical and moral direction. He argues that the marketisation of media has driven theory and research in the direction of finding commercial opportunities and that as a result of this, media theory has not yet been able to incorporate new media within its existing frameworks (40-41).

Without doubt, one of the most challenging aspects of any approach to media studies is the increasing proliferation of channels of communication and the abundant supply of information. As I will demonstrate later, there is an almost infinite and constantly changing wealth of media products that exist, and a constantly changing set of uses related to these products. McQuail terms this a "continually changing 'map' of uses of communication channels which are constantly being re-institutionalised in new forms of organisation" (41). So profound is this pattern of change that it is actually one of the primary defining elements of the media: flux. McQuail also identifies a change in balance in media use – from "consultatory to interactive" – and a delocalisation and speeding up of communication, all of which adds to a diversity of approach and an overall uncertainty about what may lie ahead (41).

McQuail identified three pillars of theory that have, to date, structured the field of communications. The first is a fundamental theory of communication that deals with “social relations and influences as mediated by communication; information processing and analysis and cultural theory”, in other words the giving and taking of meaning. The second is “medium theory”, which refers to the analysis of the channels, conduits, “carriers or vehicles of communication in their social-technical forms, which originates in response to the development of successive applications of communication technologies”. Medium theory can relate to any kind of influence stemming from the particular communication vehicle in use and McQuail identifies the metamorphosis of media from print to digital as an indication of this impact of this pillar. Thirdly, “normative theory offers critical views of society and diverse ethical concerns” (42).

McQuail devotes some time to a description of technology issues, arguing that “the form of technology underlying a medium can profoundly influence the content and also the reception of what is communicated and possibly the effects”. Indeed, many media have reference to the specific types of technology that produce them (consider the auditory nature of radio and the interactive nature of the internet) yet McQuail insists on “rescuing” media from purely technological definitions. “A medium,” he says, “is any distinctive social-cultural-technological carrier of meaning”. He later adds that all technology-based media are hybrid compositions, in which technological, social and cultural factors play a part and cannot be separated (43).

In a similar vein, he argues that a medium cannot be defined independently of its many perceived attributes or its content. This is a crucial point, which will have relevance throughout this dissertation. As McQuail puts it, “a medium is an inherently unstable construction – no generalisations about the unique consequences of any one of the familiar public mass media is ever likely to be possible” (43). McQuail is reiterating the McLuhanesque notion of the “perennial difficulty” of distinguishing between the medium and the messages

carried – although he cautions against conflating the two. “The source of the influence (of the message) is usually some attribute of the given medium, whether technological, social or cultural – often a combination. What is influenced is either the message (meaning) itself, the cultural form in which it is expressed, the receiver, the experience of use or the culture and society in which the communication transaction takes place” (43).

In *Understanding Media*, first published in 1964, Marshall McLuhan explains media as the extensions of the senses of man; a medium as the extension of self (McLuhan, 1994:8). Indeed, media have allowed us to see and hear and speak further than ever before, providing real time testimony and witness to events on the other side of the globe and taking place at times other than the now. Media allows us to hear diverse viewpoints and see things that would not ordinarily fit into our contexts of home. To McLuhan, media is more than the collection of texts and technologies that characterise modern communication; they are any technological instance of communication that can carry a message or another medium. To McLuhan, therefore, electric light and a piece of paper are both media – and although he was precisely popular for cultish comments like “the electric light is pure information”, his definition of media was perhaps too broad for the appetites of many.

Critics of McLuhan deride the “insistence on telling really big stories” and his “schema of media history that is at once so grand that media as technology are everything and so abstract that media as institution disappear into the background” (Nerone, 2003:97). It is important to bear in mind in general, and in the specific interests of this thesis, that it is media as institution that creates the media products and imagines the media audiences that make the entire socio-cultural-political media text matrix so fascinating.

One of the major challenges facing media and communication studies at present is the explosion of new media. Although this is a topic that I do not wish to get into in too much depth in this paper, it is worth noting McQuail’s

prediction that because “new technologies are non-institutionalised and delocalised, they belong to their participants and have no other purpose than those their users choose to give them” (2003:45). This has interesting implications for ideas of audience, as I will discuss further in the relevant section below. Furthermore, the proliferation of new, mainly digital, media is a case in point in diagnosing the absolute difficulty of reaching and using definitions. Media evolve and adapt at the speed of light – no sooner would a definition be forged than exceptions to the rule will emerge.

A normative approach to media studies, according to McQuail, is tied closely to what he terms “old media”, which “grew up under the shadow of government and political influence – subject to laws of countries in which they operate, run by professionals, codes of ethics, etc.” (46). The normative approach to these media is essentially that “all content was public and its producers could therefore be held responsible” (46). This approach holds that because public communication affects the rights and interests of all citizens, “the media are not exempt from expectations of decency and reason that characterise civilised society” (47) and therefore “continuously operate in a climate of potential ethical approval or disapproval” (47) which is also, therefore, necessarily pluralistic.

At this point, it may be interesting to look at the manner in which the producers of media have been studied.

Media Producers

Niklas Luhmann defines the mass media as all institutions that make use of copying technologies to disseminate information, and that generate large quantities of their media product (2000:2). While I will return at length to Luhmann’s *The Reality of Mass Media* later in this literary review, this comment is a pertinent position from which to start a discussion of the producers of mass media, often termed media “institutions” or “organisations”

by media observers, which I will attempt to construct in terms of ideas of authorship later in this paper.

Luhmann argues that the organisations that produce mass media are dependant on assumptions concerning acceptability; they are shaped by external structural conditions. He suggests that when looking at one of the ambivalent readings of “the reality of the mass media”, namely the reality of the operations of media organisations, it is important to remember that technology structures limit what is possible; what type of communications go on within and through the media machines that exist (2000:3).

This is interesting in that it ties in with Nerone’s observations about the synchronicity between the rise of the age of mass communication and the rise of industrialisation. The link between the means to produce and the power of producing media products must not be deemphasised. The clear relationship between control of means of production and the ability to print newspapers, produce TV shows, etc., raises interesting questions concerning ethics – particularly when we have been indoctrinated with the liberal democratic ideology of the role of the media in the free expression and flow of information. Sharon L. Bracci’s 2003 discussion of “Ethical Issues in Media Production” is most useful in this respect.

In the first instance, Bracci reminds us that the media is a dual-function system in that it ideally serves democratic as well as commercial purposes; it has potentially competing objectives of providing relevant and useful news and information to audiences as citizens and of amusing them as commercial consumers (115). On the one hand, “media’s broad freedoms of expression entail responsibilities to carry out their democratic function, which is the political rationale for their freedoms” (115) and on the other, “integral relations between media organizational patterns and advertising supports ... merely heighten interest in the global drive to maximise profits through advertising revenue. Advertisers pay well for exposure in media environments that deliver

audiences who are disposed to buying” (116). This means that the media, although idealised as a democratic tool, are built on commercial models. And as Bracci notes, “a commercial media model has powerful economic incentives to use its broad freedoms of expression to deliver programming that keeps audiences in a buying mood and advertisers eager to reach them” (116).

The immense clash of prerogative is clear even to the untrained eye. At what point do media institutions prioritise democratic ideals, and at what point do they prioritise their commercial survival? Is one possible without the other?

These ethical conflicts have been magnified by the trend towards media owner consolidation, which essentially translates to “structural efforts to increase audience size through print media consolidation” and “business efforts to dominate and control markets” (116). These efforts are demonstrated in reports that during the 1980s, some 50 media organisations dominated US print and electronic forms of news and entertainment but by 2001, six media conglomerates dominated the *global* market (Bracci, 2003:121).

Bracci explains that the trend towards conglomeration in media ownership could have certain theoretical benefits, such as more financial resources for the training of journalists and news gathering, and more editorial independence (123). However, “most information accessed by citizens is mediated by a handful of media conglomerates whose economic self interest can often work against public interest” (124). In fact, that the power to communicate is something that remains in the hands of the few because “media access requires economic strength” (124) means that an information oligopoly is created, something which is a cause for great concern. Bracci argues that wide exposure to diverse opinions is crucial for the functioning of the concept of the marketplace of ideas; that democratic framework in which discussion and debate shape a political will that legitimises political action,

something that is fast becoming a distant ideal of liberalism. Instead, opinions are filtered through a media industry with disproportionate power and standing to influence and distort the formation of the political will that is the legitimate basis of liberal state power. Concentrated ownership enables the same syndicated voices to dominate the conversation on major issues, whilst those with modest financial resources are disadvantaged in their struggle to articulate specific concerns and gain visibility for their opinions on these and other issues (124).

Economic and political powers are therefore closely linked when it comes to the ownership and control of the means of communicating information and opinions. It would be easy and too simplistic to blame this clear imbalance of priorities on the consumerist imperative of capitalism, however. Bracci acknowledges that advertising serves a social function, one that is by no means “intrinsically evil or morally reprehensible”, that of bringing buyers and sellers together, thereby playing a crucial role in the market economy, “helping to move manufactured goods and services from the production through the consumption phases of the business cycle. Capitalism is very good at producing things but it needs advertising to convert this into profits through consumer purchases” (125). Advertising is also a crucial player in the media matrix (as I will discuss later in Chapter 5) as it helps to pay for the costs of producing the actual media products. It will always be a part of the media landscape. Bracci reminds us that what raises ethical concerns is the “dominance of the seller’s single minded logic into dual-function media systems. When advertising values become integral to and drive media production decisions, then market logic upsets the balance between media’s democratic and commercial functions” (125).

In some respects, the dominance of the marketing mindset in media “reduces citizenship to a consumer function, making audiences themselves commodities; products for sale to advertisers” (125). This is the site of one of

the most epic conflicts in media studies, a conflict centred in the battlefield of the media owner, an issue that will also be dealt with in Chapter 5.

Bracci further explains that from an external perspective, of course, advertisers are concerned with ensuring a good environment for their product messages. They do not want TV programmes that conflict with their advertisement messages for example; indeed, they encourage content items like “comedy, adventure and escapism”, which provide the best atmosphere for selling (126). The result, says Bracci, is a commercially dominated media system that is unable to pose hard questions for fear of turning off audiences who are much more used to experiencing pleasant feelings than having to think about serious issues – once again contributing to a stunted and less fertile marketplace of ideas than the liberal, democratic and free scenario that we imagine and hope for. Without a doubt, “advertising values push public discussion and debate to the periphery of cultural space, while the dominant cultural conversation is restricted to talk about desire and fantasy, pleasure and comfort” (126). Once again, while it is hardly “evil and morally reprehensible” to discuss and prioritise such discussion, the degree of mainstream “airtime” that such attitudes occupy is cause for concern, especially when a cursory glance about ourselves reminds us that we do not yet live in a free and just society. Bigger issues are at stake, and in all media, but for news and current affairs reporting, we are encouraged only to seek pleasure and the accumulation of ever more material goods rather than creating constructive social solutions to the problems facing humankind.

Bracci also reminds us that it is also important to note that media practitioners are not oblivious to these conflicts of interest, and there are, supposedly, systems in place that protect editorial decisions about what to print – such as the “firewall” that separates editorial and business staff (126). In practice, however, institutional practices, such as the training of journalists and a system of rewards and penalties for producing content that maximises profits through ad revenues, promote self censorship (126) and the media culture of

“profits first”. The result, says Bracci, is that “diversity of opinion becomes increasingly difficult in the media industry since it is cost prohibitive for all but the financially strong to enter the market. This disproportionate power discredits hope for a marketplace of ideas, a vibrant public sphere in which open debate helps form the political will and legitimizes the use of liberal state power” (126).

Despite the fact that “media journalists currently face a crisis of public confidence in media’s will to carry out its watchdog function” (127), Bracci maintains that the “media has a powerful position to inform, influence and entertain audiences and report factually, dispassionately and fairly. The challenge, she concludes, is for media to ensure that attention to entertainment, confrontation and sensationalism does not work against media’s democratic function by draining much of the potential political power citizens can wield in these formats (128).

At this point, it might be worthwhile to take a closer look at the various levels of production in media organisations. According to D. Charles Whitney & James S. Ettema, there are three main levels of analysis when it comes to media production, the individual level, the organisational level and the institutional level (2003:159).

The essential research question at the individual level of analysis is what the role of individual consciousness is in symbol production. Although individual values are traditionally conceptualised as personal biases and each media worker has his or her particular reasons for accepting and rejecting certain stories, Whitney & Ettema argue that there is not much evidence that individual liberal bias shapes the news in general, although it may do so within certain news organisations (160). They point out that research, such as Michael Schudson’s 1995 book *The Power of News* shows that the bias is organisational and institutional rather than individual. “Biases of journalism arise not from the partisanship of its practitioners but the detachment of its

professional culture, a culture with a suspicion of all ideology but a fascination with the mechanics of conflict and the exercise of power" (160).

At the organisational level, constraints on the autonomy of individual members exist. Organisations grant workers some autonomy to deal with situations that deviate from the completely routine; and yet they retain substantial control of these workers through the inculcation of professional norms that serve the interests of the organisation. Journalistic ethic is a strong and defining system that prescribes a certain set of norms, all of which have "united journalists into a professional culture" (163), including "factual accuracy, speed at meeting deadlines, style in presentation and a shared sense of news values (162).

This last point is particularly interesting, and it calls into question how occurrences become news. Luhmann (2000:28-29) again steps in to outline five very useful selectors that are applied to the selection of new items. The first is "surprise/newness". Media producers are very concerned with ensuring that every story is new; repetition is not welcome. This often leads to the serial production of novelties as media producers go to great lengths to come up with new angles on old stories. The second is the presence of "conflicts". Any occurrence that highlights some kind of conflict, especially between powerful parties is almost immediately news. Thirdly, Luhmann highlights the presence of "quantities" in the news. He points out that "a society committed to growth is constantly threatening itself with its own past", in other words, any number that is bigger than a number related to the same event that came before it is news, whether it is higher, faster, further or bigger than ever before. This also explains how things like the price of gold and exchange rates are constantly present in the daily news. Fourthly, local relevance is a key indicator in selecting an occurrence as news. "Distance must be compensated by strangeness or gravity" (29), hence we only hear about particularly bizarre stories that happen in far off localities. Fifthly, "norm violations" are an indicator of news. Any violation of a law or an accepted moral code is immediately considered news. Scandals generate a feeling of common

concern, even though the norms themselves are only generated through their violations.

Whitney & Ettema reinforce these indicators with their own list of news values that journalists consider when judging the newsworthiness of a story, namely the presence of conflictual or unexpected events, the prominence of those involved in the events, and the degree of impact on readers and viewers, as well as proximity of event and timeliness of the report (2003:176). They also point out, however, that those news stories are often chosen by media practitioners partly due to a kind of mythical knowledge of what has always been news – “knowing a good story when you hear one” (176).

Whitney & Ettema also point out that there exists a “specialised journalistic vocabulary for typifying or summarising expectations about how potential news stories will develop and how they should be covered” (163). For example, “hard news” demands immediate attention and objective treatment. Objectivity is understood as a “set of conventions or rules for reporting and writing the story” (163) and requires that “both sides of controversial issues must be covered, as long as an official spokesperson for both sides can be found” (164). Interestingly, a common technique for showing objectivity is the use of direct quotations from sources, which is considered a “guarantee of the accuracy of the account of what a source said – though certainly not as a guarantee of the honesty of what was said” (163).

Whitney & Ettema argue that journalistic objectivity directs journalists to official sources, typically those in the government, whose version of events becomes the stuff of news (164). Indeed, a very large percentage of news stories are made up of official commentary, such that “news is not so much an account of what happened as it is a compilation of what officials say about what happened” (164). To illustrate this, Whitney & Ettema point to a content analysis of seven major newspapers in the US, which revealed that officials in the executive branch of the US government constituted nearly 60 per cent of

all the sources used in stories about national security interests. This suggests a very specific “politics of knowledge” that is actively entrenched by media producers and “embedded in the nature and type of social and cultural relations that develop between journalists and their sources” (164). While there are indeed a range of voices present in media reports, “the range or diversity of voices heard in press coverage of events is “indexed” less to the range of public opinion than to the range of governmental debate” (173).

These types of routine production procedures are, according to Whitney & Ettema, a fact of life in most other media organisations as well. Culture-producing organisations struggle to bring their tasks under control through routinisation of the production process (165). For example, when it comes to the production of television programmes, “formulaic plot lines and stereotypical characters of much popular entertainment are examples of a content-based coping strategy for routinising symbol production” (166). The bottom line is that due to ongoing pressure to produce new material in order to keep up with the various “news selectors” and marketing pressures, media producers are forced to stick to formulas that they know will produce the media product that is expected of them in the minimum time frame possible. “Research at the organisational level of analysis has compellingly demonstrated that these routines are intimately connected to the form, content and meaning of those cultural products” (166).

At the institutional level, “the economic arrangements within media industries have important implications for the work of professional mass communications and in turn, for the form, content and meaning of media messages” (166). This “cultural economy” informs the competitive environment within which both the individual and organisational players operate.

But Whitney & Ettema caution that “competition is certainly no guarantee of creativity or quality” (167). In fact, “the market knowledge of television news with its drive to minimize costs and maximise profits produces news that is

trivial – and often wrong. Television newsrooms are consumed with the “competitive ethos” in which “not getting beaten” by the competition on breaking news stories becomes the basic standard of performance”. This competitive ethos is ironic in that it ultimately serves the interests of the “corporate oligopoly that controls most of the media industry – an oligopoly that by its very nature discourages competition in the political economic sphere” (167).

Interestingly, Whitney & Ettema point out that “at the institutional level of analysis, the task of professional mass communicators and their organisations is not so much to produce media content as to produce media audiences. The production of economically meaningful audiences is a process that transcends the boundaries of any particular media organisation to encompass the larger media industry system” (168). This relates to Bracci’s argument that media producers are primarily concerned with keeping their audiences “turned on” to consumerist messages. I will discuss approaches towards audience research more in the next section of the literary review.

Once again, analysts of media production raise ethical questions regarding the responsibility of media producers. Whitney & Ettema explain that the press has the potential to “serve as a stand in for the public, holding the government accountable, not to the public, but to the ideals and rules of the democratic polity itself” (169). Dealing with issues of media production and the rationale and democratic role of such production necessitates a discussion of media content. Whitney & Ettema therefore offer a précis of attitudes towards researching media content, which have been informed by three theoretical perspectives: sociological, political-economic and culturological (169).

The sociological perspective holds that the reality portrayed in the news is socially constructed and that there is no meaningful social reality independent from humanity’s ability to construct and convey meaning (170). The news media plays an important role in processing raw occurrences into important

social phenomena through thematisation and framing. Frames are largely unspoken and unacknowledged but nonetheless organise the world both for journalists who report stories and to important degree for those who rely on their reports (170). Such frames are employed by the media to make sense of the world and are most often those with cultural resonance; that is they draw on the themes, metaphors, examples and images deeply embedded in cultural belief systems (171).

The political-economic perspective focuses on the ways in which powerful institutions shape media content, something that is an enduring social reality. The fact that economic relationships and processes determine the content of social discourse is inescapable (171) – recall Bracci’s observation that media access requires economic strength. Whitney & Ettema highlight a weakness of the political-economic approach: it relates the economic structure of the media directly to the political content of the news and entertainment without much concern for the individual and organisational processes in-between (172). “Authors in the critical Marxist tradition usually argue that the relationship between capitalist ownership of the means of mass communication and the content of the news is mediated by the professional culture and practices of journalism. This culture of objectivity allows, indeed it prizes, autonomy, as evidenced by occasional clashes with corporate and governmental authorities, but it also demands fairness and balance within the limits of the consensus or the enduring values or the common sense of liberal capitalism” (172).

Whitney & Ettema point out that “if journalism is a tool of social control – and one need not be a Marxist to argue that it is – the tool is used with subtlety in liberal democracies. While a few authors, such as Chomsky, suggest that the mainstream news media work to stifle dissent entirely, most have argued that the media primarily direct and shape political dialogue or limit the diversity of opinion and information that is expressed” (173). This is particularly clear if one contrasts explicit government control and repression of independent

media, such as is happening at present in Zimbabwe, with the clearly “free market” pressures at work in South Africa’s democracy.

The cultorological perspective functions at the highest level of analysis, culture. Whitney & Ettema describe culture as a symbolic system constituted primarily in language, the context in which individuals, organisations, industries and institutions function (173). What, then, is the cultorological perspective? According to Whitney & Ettema, it is a “focus on cultural givens: the widely shared assumptions about the world and the widely used strategies for making sense of it” (174) and it takes several shapes. The first is an effort to “learn about culture producers by carefully analysing their cultural products: the content of film, television, literature, etc” through the use of tools such as narrative theory. This “has been applied to the study of putatively factual content as well as explicitly fictional material”. Whitney & Ettema point out that news stories are just that, stories, and that facts and stories are mutually constituted (174). “A story requires facts for its existence but the facts require a story for theirs. A news story is assembled from available and relevant facts, but those facts only become available if journalists know how to locate them” (174). This interesting framework allows cultorological observers of the media to understand the activities of media producers as “an attempt to bring sense to the world through the imposition of narrative structure on the raw occurrences of the world” (175).

It is worth quoting Schudson from Whitney & Ettema to demonstrate the power that narrative forms can have on perceptions of reality:

The power of the media lies not only (and not even primarily) in its power to declare things to be true, but in its power to provide the forms in which the declarations appear. News in a newspaper or on television has a relationship to the ‘real world’ not only in content but in form; that is, in the way the world is incorporated into unquestioned and unnoticed conventions of narration, and then transfigured, no longer a subject for discussion but a premise of any conversation at all (176).

Literary devices such as the use of irony in media story telling also communicate very specific power dynamics (176).

Overall, Whitney & Ettema sum up the culturological approach to media analysis as follows:

Communicators, whether working on stories to be told as fact or as fiction, draw upon cultural traditions as creative resources and, in turn, become the interpreters of those traditions thereby renewing the ability of the traditions to make sense of the world. Those creating for mass media are seeking and creating new meaning in the combination of cultural elements with embedded significance. Thus, to understand the nature of forms of mass mediated creativity would be to understand both widely shared narrative forms and ritual processes of the culture as well as uniquely personal inspirations and insights of the individual communicator (177).

In summing up their discussion, Whitney & Ettema point out that “much of what we know about mass communicators is based on the analysis of a few work roles (e.g. reporters and producers) in a few types of media organisations (e.g. newspapers and TV). Studies concerned with other roles and organisations are also necessary” (178). Here they highlight, in particular, advertising and public relations – pointing out that the practitioners of these industries are rarely studied under the rubric of professional mass communicators and that there is also little analysis of how the campaigns are created (178). This is a gap that I hope to partially address in Chapter 5’s subsection “Horizontal Influences on Authorship”. While I hardly offer a detailed study of how the advertising and public relations industries operate and create their campaigns, I think that my description of their role in “authoring” media is certainly a useful starting point. As well as this, the concept of a cast of authors writing the media megatext (also discussed in Chapter 5) may be constructive in directing further research towards these fields.

Audience-Consumers

At this point it would be useful to offer an overview of the manner in which audiences have been researched and analysed by media theorists. One of the key aspects of the idea of audience has been the metamorphosis from a locationally present audience, limited in size, which would watch plays and

performances to a mass, anonymous, distant and public audience accessed by the advent of technology, which allowed the communicative exchange to take place without both parties present in the same space. The audience therefore experienced a major shift from presence to absence as a result of the intermediation of technology. Now media theorists are observing another momentous shift caused by technological developments: that of the individualisation of the audience, which is shifting from a perceived passive mass to an interactive individual. Sonia Livingstone's ideas are particularly useful in mapping these transitions. She notes the characteristics of the media audience as follows: it is receptive rather than participatory, dispersed rather than co-located and privatized rather than public (2003:347). Furthermore, she notes that the media audience is particularly difficult to study as it leaves no physical record (while media producers and texts obviously do) (348).

She argues that modern media and communication technologies possess a hitherto unprecedented power to encode and circulate symbolic representations and the continual engagement with these media has implications for our domestic practices, our social relationships and our very identities (337). When it comes to audience research, it is important to remember that analysts are "studying a moving target" (339) whether they are analyzing how people can be said to be active in shaping their media culture, contributing to the process of shaping or co-constructing their material and symbolic environments, or in other words, how audiences use media, or how the content of media is interpreted by and/or affects the audience-consumers (339).

Livingstone argues that "the concept of audience is the underpinning prop for the analysis of the social impact of mass communication in general" (341) and reminds us that "the perception of the audience as a social phenomenon 'out there' must be replaced by the recognition that the audience is a discursive construct produced by a particular analytic gaze, hence the analysis of audiences must include the very discourses that construct people as

audiences (or public or markets), including the audience's notion of themselves as audience" (339).

Livingstone advocates an integrated analysis of production, texts and audiences that stresses the interrelation of these elements in the (re)production of cultural meanings and which differs from traditional approaches to mass communication that "analyse each as separate but interlinked elements in the linear flow of mediated meanings" (340). The central question of interest to Livingstone is how media frame relations among people as audience (340). In answering this question, she maps the transition from "text to context", from a reader oriented literary/semiotic analysis to social analysis (344).

She begins her semiotic analysis by offering an overview of "reception analysis", the theorizing of "how texts anticipated, invited and so were fitted for, readers with a specific interpretive repertoire of codes, presuppositions and interpretive frames" (341). Drawing particularly on Umberto Eco's conception of the Model Reader and Stuart Hall's "Encoding/Decoding" model (two critics that I will also refer to later in this thesis), she explains how "the audience is a potentially crucial pivot for the understanding of a whole range of social and cultural processes that bear on the central questions of public communication, which are essentially questions of culture" (341).

Livingstone draws on Eco's emphasis that "readers must strive to realize the necessarily virtual meaning of a text by drawing on their own cultural resources during the process of interpretation" and Hall's rejection of "the linearity of the mainstream, social-psychological model of mass communication in order to stress the intersections but also the disjunction between processes of encoding and decoding, contextualizing both within a complex cultural framework" (341) in order to demonstrate the actualization of reception-aesthetics theory. Furthermore, she argues that "Hall incorporated elements of reception-aesthetics into his neo-Marxist account of popular

culture, proposing that 'the degrees of understanding and misunderstanding in the communicative exchange depend on the degrees of symmetry and asymmetry (relations of equivalence) established between the positions of the personifications encoder-producer and decoder/receiver'" (342). "Mass communication is," she concludes, "a circuit of articulated practices, each of which represents a site of meaning-making and which contrasts with the widespread metaphor of communication transmission as a linear pattern from sender to receiver" (342).

Virginia Nightingale also assesses Hall's encoding/decoding model in her article, "The Cultural Revolution in Audience Research". She identifies three levels of analysis in Hall's model: the infrastructure of everyday life, meaning structures that are in operation in processes of encoding and decoding and programme as meaningful discourse (2003: 362-363). She links these levels of analysis with Appadurai's technoscape and financescape, ideoscape and mediascape. Overall, she argues that the researchers should take account of the "social context that creates both production teams and audiences and that generates a need for the continuous remaking of society's ideas about itself" (362). She also argues that the "discernment of a message in the media programme is subject to the interested/motivated deployment of discourse: at the moment of encoding, message production is subject to the meaning structures in play within the production teams. At the moment of decoding, message production is subject to the meaning structures at play in the life world of audience members" (363).

She also, however, notes that Hall's model was "insufficiently responsive to the methodological difficulties it created and to the requirement, inherent in the model, of a radical re-evaluation of the role of the researcher" and that it failed to advocate a sufficiently sophisticated analysis of texts (363).

Livingstone continues her discussion by pointing out that "empirical reception studies have variously explored the relationships between media texts –

typically the television genres of soap opera and news – and their audience” (343). This means that essentially, studies of audiences have focused on discrete audience interpretations or decodings, which diverge depending on viewers’ socioeconomic position, gender or ethnicity. Livingstone explains that in this paradigm, “the possibilities for critical or oppositional readings are anticipated, enabled or restricted by the degree of closure semiotically encoded into the text and by audiences’ variable access to symbolic resources” (343).

Livingstone continues to map the shift from text to context in audience oriented media research by describing the “ethnographic approach,” which shifts towards contextualizing the reader’s textual interpretation in the “culture of the everyday” (345). This raises the crucial distinction between “media-as-object (which invites analysis of media use) and media-as-text (which invites an analysis of media content)” (345). In this way, similar to the way in which meaning is doubled when considering media-as-institution and media-as-technology-product, as discussed earlier on p.12 of this thesis, as well as in the situation where media is a dual-purpose system in that it fulfils both democratic and commercial aims, as discussed earlier on p.19 of this thesis, “the audience is therefore also doubled as the consumer-viewer: people are always both interpreters of media-as-text and users of media-as-object” (346). Interestingly, Luhmann also notes a doubling of the media audience – that of concurrent “individualization and de-individualisation” of the subject who participates in communication (Luhmann, 2000:74). This refers to a process whereby people generally engage with media products as lone readers and apply their own experiences and insights into their reading processes. Yet media producers aim those exact texts towards a mass of generic, personality-less people. In a similar vein Nerone argues that in the media, individual acts of reading are hard to identify. Rather, he says that “the individual reader and the audience seem to exist on different planes. The *public*, a collective body, is not the *people*, all of the individual readers or citizens. Instead the public only exists through acts of representation, and the

media have more power than the people when it comes to representing the public” (Nerone, 2003:107). Media audiences could therefore be understood as the confluence of the public and the people.

Livingstone then goes on to discuss the factors forcing an evolution in audience. Firstly, she points out that although there is little evidence of a transformation in content, through technology media forms have changed significantly. “New media objects have carried old media messages, recycling broadcasters archives, proliferating new shows using old formats and uploading existing print media content onto the world wide web” (346).

The fact that media content has changed little while media format has changed much has interesting implications for the study of media audiences. In the first instance, “audiences are increasingly required to participate audibly and physically – such as clicking on hypertext links” (354). New media also facilitate the multiplication of personally owned media-objects such as personal computers, cell phones and digital cameras, thereby encouraging the privatization of media use. Overall, Livingstone argues that “the diversification of media and media contents is facilitating wider trends towards individualization, in which media goods and contents are used to construct lifestyles no longer grounded in sociodemographically-defined traditions” (354). This “convergence of traditionally distinct media is resulting in a blurring of traditionally distinct social boundaries, potentially undermining traditional hierarchies of expertise and authority” (354).

Livingstone concludes by suggesting that “instead of asking what audiences – conceived as an artificial reification of a particular technological interface – are really like, we should rather conceptualize “the audience” as a relational or interactional construct, a shorthand way of focusing on the diverse relationships among people – who are first and foremost workers, neighbours, parents, teachers or friends – as mediated by historically and culturally

specific social contexts as well as by historically and culturally specific technological forms” (353).

At this point Virginia Nightingale's 2003 description of audience as a four part construction becomes very useful. She prefaces her argument with a useful overview and criticism of the “uses and gratifications” approach, which has, according to her reference, Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, five principal assumptions. These are namely that audience members are engaged in goal directed activity; that the initiative for linking need gratification with media choice lies with the audience member; that media compete with other sources of need satisfaction and should be understood in this context; people are sufficiently self-aware to report their interests and motives and finally, that audience orientations should be explored on their own terms in order to be able to differentiate the findings of uses and gratifications research from much speculative writing about popular culture (364). Nightingale argues that “these are value-based theoretical positions” (364) that do “not make sense as a model of mass communication because they assumes a means/ends relation between people and the media – and man is a cultural being” (365).

Instead she offers a conception of media audience that is at once simple and encompassing. She returns to her dictionary to discover that the definition of “audience” expresses four discrete phenomena: a group of people assembled, an imagined group of people to which a text is addressed; a situation in which an interview takes place, or a happening; and a hearing – an opportunity to voice an opinion (368). Nightingale then takes each phenomenon and applies it to audience research, arguing that “most research about the ‘people assembled’ and the ‘people addressed’ falls into the category of research about people, but the focus of the cultural approach to audience research has been on *happening* and *hearing* meanings, which suggest that the audience may be understood as a space where meanings are created, challenged, negotiated, reassessed, resisted or accepted” (368).

A large degree of research has taken place in order to quantify the audience as “people assembled”, in terms of the numbers of people who actually engage in a media text. These “audience ratings” are inherently useful to key political and economic interests. Indeed, they are a “commodity provided to broadcasters and advertisers for the limited and highly specific purpose of providing audience measurement data, upon which advertising strategies and production planning are based” (368).

On this tack, Whitney & Ettema point out that “content specialisation in magazines and the growth of specialised cable channels in the past two decades became possible because advances in audience measurement technologies facilitated the identification – or more accurately, the creation – of specialised audiences that could be documented and in turn, sold to advertisers” (2003:168). Such “industrial and institutional ways of “knowing the audience” profoundly influence media practice and content” (168).

In terms of the audience as “people addressed”, Nightingale suggests that it is “imagined by the creators of communication, who develop ideas and preconceptions about the people who will eventually engage with their message. These ideas are actively deployed during the writing process and the ways in which people will respond are imagined” (2003:369). This image of the audience has generated both literary criticism type research about the structure of the messages themselves and empirical research about the actual people that message makers would like to interest in their product. In this sense, “audience development is informed by a belief that the more carefully the cultural tastes of the audience are reflected in a cultural form, the more successfully that form will attract users” (369).

At this stage, Nightingale delves into less standard conceptions of the audience. What she terms “audience as happening” occurs when the media is substituted for an authority figure and the audience demands action from various components of a person’s body as well as their brain (371). When

embodiment and space, body and place, become integral to the concept of audience, it is a happening. She illustrates this process by referring to ethnographical and cultural research of audiences and subcultures, where often, audiences and their practices were exoticised (372). This process also led to passive stereotypes of audiences being replaced by a Rabelaisian cast of “Active” and exotic audience characterizations. The researcher’s terminology usually singled out and exaggerated some characteristic of the subculture which was then taken as a sign of the inherent nature of its engagement with media (372). It is crucial to note that in this context, Nightingale is referring to media-as-technology and media-as-product (in the sense of an urban subculture that might prefer a certain type of musical genre or media product, like vinyl records) rather than media-as-institution or media-as-text.

The fourth and final understanding of audience, says Nightingale, is as a hearing or audition, meaning that “a person will be offered an opportunity to have their say and to be listened to” (374). On an obvious level, this includes media products such as “talkback radio and TV talk shows, where audience as hearing become a performance in its own right – in the Jerry Springer Show, Jerry sits amongst the audience and allows the presenters to perform their personal dramas to a noisy, abusive and judgmental studio audience” (374). In this sense, then, audience as hearing is also packaged as a commodity.

On another level of audience as hearing, Nightingale points out that “many researchers justify their research practice on the basis of its capacity to speak for the participating audience members, particularly in the case of the use of marginalized focus groups” (375) such as “Latino women” or “black people” and how they are represented in the media. In this sense, media research that has doubled as activism, “which seeks to document a particular situation that adversely affects a particular group and to argue for changes that will rectify the discriminatory treatment” has come under close scrutiny. Nightingale

points out that media researchers are no longer free to “adopt a problem, and to unilaterally decide how it will be researched” (375).

Nightingale also argues that audience research history has essentially been split into two phases.

During the first half of the 20th Century researchers sought to understand media with functionalist theories that reinforced widely held beliefs about individualism and personal choice whereas during the second half of the 20th Century researchers followed the leads offered by theories of culture. Structuralism, poststructuralism, modernity and post-modernity shifted focus of research from individualism to identity and from social functions to cultural meaning of media. (376)

In conclusion, Nightingale suggests that “the bifurcation of information as culture and product is evident in approaches to audience research. Researching audiences as people generates information commodities and researching audiences as spaces (happenings and hearings) can help us to explore information as culture” (377).

These various approaches to the research of audience are interesting in that they raise questions about the nature of the mass audience. It seems that critical media theory accepts that the audience is, in many aspects, a collection of discrete readers so vast that it could almost be termed a “mega reader”. Furthermore, it is clear that technological developments have allowed the growth of the audience to take place at an almost exponential rate, significantly affecting the way that it has been studied and conceived of in the history of communication. In the sub-section titled “The Model Reader” in Chapter 5, I hope to offer some practical insights into how media audiences are created and approached in everyday media practice.

The Reality of the Mass Media

At this point I would like to move on to a fairly extensive review of Niklas Luhmann’s 2000 book *The Reality of Mass Media*. His approach towards media studies is enlightening in that he argues in favour of “theoretical tools

abstract enough to make a place for the theory of mass media within a general theory of modern society" (8). This approach is distinct from the other approaches reviewed up till this point in that it integrates an analysis of media into a theory of reality – something that is lacking in any of the approaches reviewed thus far which have focussed on the audience, particular media texts or the media producers. Also, his integrative insights work well to synergise the various approaches that have been covered until this point and will lay a fertile ground for some of the ideas that I hope to develop beyond this literature review.

Luhmann opens his argument by discussing what he terms "differentiation as a doubling of reality". What the media actually does, according to Luhmann, is manufacture products that are the bearers of communication through technologies of dissemination. The interposition of technology between senders and receivers rules out direct interaction and thereby removes, or defers (or differs) the reality of the subject of the communication from the reality of the form that the communicated product takes. As Luhmann points out in his opening words, "everything we know about our society or indeed about the world in which we live is through mass media," (1) we know about things not because we've experienced them first hand but because "we've heard tell of it" (1). On the other hand, he continues, we know enough about mass media to not trust it completely. In fact, by their very existence, the "mass media generate a transcendental illusion" (4), they "double reality" by contrasting operations and observations. The first, if you like, original reality exists and it is then doubled by the observed reality of the mass media (4). The mass media is "forced to distinguish between self reference and other reference," in other words, they must construct an observed reality distinct from their own operational reality. According to Luhmann, the central question in media studies is how the mass media construct this reality.

This ongoing tension between self-reference and other-reference means that "mass media functions according to the assumption that its own

communications will be continued” (11). This assumption in turn means that the reality of the system of mass media is always a correlate of the system’s own operations (12). Furthermore, the operations vs. observations distinction means that there is also always a distinction between the topics and functions of communication (13).

Luhmann then moves on to a discussion of coding, which he contextualises within an observation that “any communication can be connected to any other communication on the condition that a context of meaning is established” (15). He considers it a decisive achievement of the system of mass media that technologies of dissemination that render interaction impossible have been invented, thereby establishing a self-fulfilling need for ongoing coding between a sender and receiver who are no longer co-present, and who are likely never to be again. Indeed, “the success of scheduled communication no longer depends on oral communication” (16). Visual, aural and verbal text communications have taken the place of one-on-one speech interactions, and these have further been codified into complex media that require systematic and careful construction (production).

Luhmann explains that the “code of the system of mass media is the distinction of information and non-information”, a distinction that serves to determine which operations belong to the system and which operations do not (17). Furthermore, he claims that all information that relies on categorisations is pre-structured in that its space of possibility within a selective range has been marked (18). The relationship between information and communication is intricate and crucial: information is processed everywhere that consciousness or communication is at work and without information there can be no communication. Information, says Luhmann, is a difference which makes a difference in some later event (18). Information cannot be repeated – for if it is it becomes an event, and therefore non-information (19). This is particularly true of mass media, whose function it is to translate information into events (or as some other theorists might term it, into *stories* or narratives).

The information that they acquire is therefore selective and once it is processed, it is rendered useless unless new information allows it to be “further divided into fields of selection” (18) and transformed into another event (or an updated story). This is certainly true for individual media institutions – they will never repeat news stories within the boundaries of their own media products – but they will happily repeat (syndicate) information into or from other media products.

Luhmann notes this as a constant loop of input and output, where the media is constantly forced to feed its own output back as input (20). “As information becomes non-information the media are forced to provide new information” (20). This means that every act of communication creates social redundancy – to the extent that mass media spreads information so broadly that one can assume that everyone knows it (20). This redundancy serves a purpose – it generates a need to replace redundant information with new information (which will quickly also become redundant) (21). Like money, information operates within an economy; in fact, Luhmann argues that information and money are the two central motives of modern social dynamics. The striving for the new is a “repeated impulse” (21), one perhaps to which the mass media is enslaved. The neurotic need constantly to offer something new for self-assessment is nothing more than a need for global judgement, and, just as we think that the operations of the mass media have been clarified, Luhmann reminds us that “new/old” is nothing but one schema (21). The media also undertakes to promote “highly selective ways of being old”. Luhmann argues that the combination of these schema result in a “specific restlessness and irritability that arises in society” forcing us to constantly be prepared for surprises, reminding us that tomorrow we will know more than we do today: generating and processing our collective irritation. “Mass media keep society on its toes” by constantly confronting us with new problems through its daily repeated effectivity (22).

Luhmann argues that through differentiation, the media system distinguishes itself, and he suggests that mass media analysis should take place on the same level as analysis of the economic system, where a “complementary relationship between universalism and specification” exists (23). In other words, a system such as mass media assumes itself as a point of reference for its own functions (23). This kind of system-specific universalism means that “biased elements of media can exist but as long as they are among other “independent” sources the system remains self referential” (24). Importantly, all independent media are “supported by the market of the economic system” just as “all strands of mass media use the information/non-information code” (24).

Luhmann then goes on to discuss three strands of media: “news and in-depth reporting”, “advertising” and “entertainment”.

In terms of new and in-depth reporting, he suggests that “mass media disseminate ignorance in the form of facts which must constantly be renewed so no one notices (25). An important relation between perceptions of truth and the time-space continuum is in operation in the serial production of news. In the first instance, “the impression must be given that what has gone into the past is still present” in order for information to be considered an “event”. Secondly, Luhmann reminds us that it is in human nature to believe that when information is offered in the mode of news and reporting people believe it to be relevant and true (26). Indeed, “the conditions of truth demanded by the mass media are significantly different to those of scientific research” (26). The news is nothing more than a value-laden simulacrum for what actually happened – Luhmann says that “it is not possible to have a point for point correspondence between information and facts” (27). Therefore, any differentiation between actual facts and the manner in which they are interpreted into information means that slippage occurs – all news therefore is a type of mapping of slippage. At this point it might be relevant to reiterate the five selectors of news that Luhmann identified: surprise/newness, conflicts,

quantities, local relevance and norm violations. These selectors could be understood as mapping points of media as simulacra, which will be discussed further in the next subsection "Media and the Hyperreal".

Luhmann's discussion of "norms" is particularly interesting. He says that "norms are more sensitive to deviations than facts, which is where the expectations concerning the probable/improbable distinction are regulated" (31). The function of mass media in relation to the "maintenance and reproduction of morality" does not equal the ability to "raise society's moral standard and encourage good behaviour" (31). Morality is therefore largely imagined through mass media, which highlight "sufficiently spectacular cases" in a manner that entrenches the "norms" that the "news" undermines. Luhmann calls this process one of "ongoing renovation" and the media's role in renovating ideas of morality is certainly dominant. Any number of practical examples could be cited to demonstrate this observation, such as the media coverage of the Bill Clinton/Monica Lewinsky scandal in the US, with the US president's sexual impropriety with an intern highlighting the societal moral norms of sexual prudence and faithfulness to one's spouse precisely through the scandalous incident involving the cigar and the blue dress, and the norm of honesty under oath, highlighted by Clinton's famous finger-wagging TV appearance where he insisted that he did not have sexual relations with "that woman" despite all evidence to the contrary.

The mass media are also the site for a "cultural institutionalisation of action" (32), in which interest in particular people (celebrities) is reproduced without any access to them. In this way, the news media create iconic people as tangible symbols of an unknown future (32). It is exactly this kind of topicality, where the news media insist on concentrating on individual cases such as those of high profile people, which allows the expression of opinions to be continually disseminated as news (33). Everyday people can only really counter these ongoing one-way reams of expert opinions through letters to the editor (34) but even these are carefully selected by the media producers.

What unites news and in-depth actuality reports is that they both have claims to the truth (35). While news reports are dependant on a schema of reporting "daily facts", in-depth reporting is dependant on a schema of memory. In-depth news reports are "reactualised truths" (36) which choose to re-access past events in order to authenticate them again. In this sense then, in-depth reports rely on memory, which "is only the ongoing discrimination between forgetting and remembering" (37). Through news, we are encouraged to forget, to focus only on what is ever new, yet through in-depth reporting we are encouraged to remember, to focus on what was once new and now no longer is. The selective use of memory in factual media (which is perhaps a useful term for news and in-depth reporting) is interesting in that it "marks what is familiar in order to prevent forgetting". Luhmann concludes by saying that "without memory nothing is new, without deviation no memory could develop" (38).

Overall, according to Luhmann, the mass media, although projecting a system of values that supposedly follows the true/untrue code, actually follows the information/non-information code (36). This in turn encourages in society a "drug-like distraction towards ever new items of news" (39).

As opposed to news, "advertising declares its motives and refines or conceals its methods" (44). Advertising rarely makes a secret of the fact that it wishes to encourage the receiver of its messages to buy its products, but it does not encourage the receiver to buy in an open way. Instead, says Luhmann, advertising "hides the actual product" (46) by playing with distinctions and paradoxes and exploiting the conscious/non-conscious divide. It is based on "making the motives of the people targeted unrecognisable" so that they do not recognise how they are being influenced (45). Furthermore, advertising shuts down any potential for further communication by making its messages closed and finite through a trend towards formal beauty (45), about achieving pleasing appearances alone (48). Once this formal beauty is achieved and

thereby linked to the product being sold, advertisers have had their say and wish to say no more. It abuses the relationship of surface and depth; using only lineations of the surface in order to suggest depth (48). Interestingly, as well as this constant striving for formal beauty, advertisers also dress up their media in “factual information” (63) making the synergies between perceived aesthetics and perceived truth even more interesting. Advertising considers one of its major roles, apart from selling, as offering a free service: providing people with good taste (46), a taste which is intended to structure desire (47). Luhmann argues that this is somewhat misdirected as the market only differentiates according to price (47).

Like all media, advertising is a construction of reality which continues its own reality (48). Advertising generates the illusion that the same is new (50), as opposed to news that must constantly remodel the same in order to make it new. Advertising’s main necessity is to remain visible (49) and its main problem is to introduce new things while maintaining brand loyalty (50).

The function of the mass media with regard to advertising is that of stabilising the relationship of redundancy and variety in everyday culture (50). Later, Luhmann also points out that the American press secured its independence through advertising (63), a fact crucial to any understanding of the role of advertising in mass media. What he means by this is that without the financial income derived from selling advertising, the American (and in fact all free) press would have been incapable of setting itself up as a communications entity distinct from, because not financially reliant on, government.

The third programme strand identified by Luhmann is entertainment. He describes it as “the component of modern leisure culture, charged with the function of destroying superfluous time” (51). Games, and by extension all forms of entertainment, are a kind of “doubling of reality”, complete with time limit episodes (51).

Entertainment media have a “fictional unity” that allows “real reality to be distinct from fictional reality” (54). This fictional unity is demonstrated through a series of self-produced surprises and self-contained tensions (54). Although we complain about the predictability of movie plots or the repetitiveness of pop music, it is exactly these qualities that make these examples of entertainment media texts just that – entertaining – and that allow us to be passive, relaxed and entertained.

It is precisely this kind of passivity that most entertainment media hope to elicit. In fact, Luhmann describes the viewers as “like parasites” (60) in that they are invited to relate the subtext of what they have seen to themselves (60). By offering such stimulation from the outside, “entertainment aims to activate that which we ourselves experience” (58). Entertainment texts are perhaps those media texts that can be best analysed with a literary approach – as Luhmann says “the modern novel arises out of modern journalism” (55). The link between text and reality has never been looser.

Another key aspect of entertainment media is that “the mechanism of the generating of the text must not appear again in the text itself, otherwise self and other reference could not be distinguished” from one another (57). Entertainment media aim for the parasitic viewer to focus on the experiences and motives of the characters in the text and thereby learn second order observation (57).

Luhmann recognises that it may be difficult to accept the theory of a mass media system based on three such different pillars (news, advertising and entertainment) (64). He suggests, however, that the social function of the mass media in its entirety “is found in the memory generated by the totality of information actualised by each programme strand” (65). This unity is achieved through the maintenance of “structural couplings” and the reproduction of “different dependencies on other function systems” (66). What the mass

media do is make “available background knowledge and carry on writing it as a starting point for communication” (66).

Interestingly, although the mass media project and portray themselves as reliable sources of fact, they are “always working at discrediting themselves” (68). The constant interplay of trivial and non-trivial information and non-information implies a problematisation of information, whether or not self-reference is being observed (67).

An interesting question raised by this discussion is whether, and if so how, the mass media is continually deconstructing, and thereby constructing itself. The ongoing diversification of relationships that is apparent within mass media and between it and other systems is an ongoing form of differentiation. “The divisions of the mass media into programme strands and then also within the programme strands, make visible the collapse of the order once described as class society” (69). Is this balkanisation of mass media, evident in the ever growing plethora of new instances of media, particularly in the case of new media, a breaking down (of a single system) or a building up (of many sub-systems)?

These ongoing structural couplings and uncouplings, as well as shared use of the same technologies and the assumption of the individual observer all unite mass media (71).

Luhmann then moves on to ask a key question regarding the media’s role in the construction of reality, asking what knowledge of the world is produced and reproduced by the system of mass media (76). He argues that “causality can only be represented by singling out particular causes or effects” and that “conflicts of opinion negotiated in mass media operate with diverse causal attributions and lend themselves the appearance of compact relationships to facts” (77). Whether or not the representation of these “facts” in the media can

in fact be compactly related to the reality of the facts in question is a matter of some debate.

He argues that news and in-depth reporting “provide the most direct portrayal of reality” (78). The manner in which society is represented through the news media is significant in that it is mainly the fissures that are noticed. Society’s cracks are reported and (over) represented, while conformity and assent remain underexposed (78).

Furthermore, mass media determine the way in which the world is read in terms of morality; without fail, and despite claims of objectivity, the mass media inevitably assign moral perspectives to descriptions of reality (79). In most other normal interactions, however, says Luhmann, morality is not needed: “Morality is always a symptom of the occurrence of pathologies and is a supplement to selectivity” (79). Public morality needs the obviously scandalous in order to have occasion to rejuvenate itself (80) – it needs the hype created and perpetuated by mass media, as evidence by the Clinton-Lewinsky affair discussed briefly earlier.

Advertising, on the other hand, instead of concentrating moral attention like the news media, “scatters its communication over so many objects and receivers that each has the impression that there is something better than what they will ever be able to achieve for themselves” (80). Advertising forces receivers to experience their limitations simply in terms of a lack of purchasing power (80).

Interestingly, Luhmann points out the difference between the inside and the outside of fiction; of narrative and author; machinery of public and receivers, a difference that he says is undermined by the crossing of a boundary (82). The boundary that has been crossed, in fact, criss-crossed over and over again is that between senders and receivers of information. The balkanisation of media that I referred to earlier, as well as the ongoing emergence of new

media, means that the distinguishing lines between text producers and text consumers are becoming more and more blurred. Luhmann points out that “communication today seems to be borne by visual knowledge that is no longer capable of being controlled subjectively (82).

Luhmann argues that the mass media construct reality through a most important trait that runs through all three programme strands – “the process of producing information that sets up a horizon of self-generated uncertainty which must be serviced with more and more information” (82) or, as he terms it, autopoiesis. Autopoiesis is the reproduction of communication from outcomes of communication and it has no goal or natural end (83). The construction of reality through the media is also defined by the dominating dimension of time – the before/after distinction becomes the central indicator of meaning (83). Time is closely related to the ideas of re-production and re-shaping – the central activity of all media. Indeed, “without reproduction there would be no originals” (86); without reporting (observation) there would be nothing to report, without news stories there would be no reality. “Reality is the two sided form of the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ being observed” (84).

The reality of mass media, therefore, according to Luhmann is a “reality of second order observations that replace knowledge prescriptions” (85) and those are products and alibis of culture, and vice versa.

Luhmann then turns to a discussion of the “reality of construction”, where he argues that, as an operationally closed system that generates indicators of reality at the level of its own operations, the media essentially generate resistance to themselves (89). Empirical social research of media is aimed at obtaining data as documentation for political and economic decisions or in correcting stereotypes that the media has established (90); this in itself shows that there is a reality of construction in which the media is itself implicit. If not, then it would not be necessary to undergo research to demonstrate that black people are typically portrayed as violent aggressors in the media, as

Nightingale discusses, for example, something that is not a realistic (or at all politically correct) portrayal of black people.

Mass media do not rely on the dogma of classical epistemologies, says Luhmann; they may generate reality but a reality that is not subject to consensus (92). This reality is based on the “central phantom of recursivity of experience and actions”, the I, which “lives from the body as ground of all perception but is additionally enriched and confused by knowledge gained through mass media” (91). The mass media do construct reality in both tangible and non-tangible ways, they allow the individual to access realities that they may never have even dreamed of (like information about places far away and people infinitely richer than them) but they also leave the illusion of a cognitively accessible reality untouched (92). Luhmann suggests that the mass media offer, as a solution to the individual trapped between the tangible realities that they perceive with their eyes and ears through media but can almost never live through their own lives, is “the distinction of a world not subject to consensus” (93). “Reality is no longer subject to consensus; it is sufficient to weld together one’s own view of reality with one’s own identity and assert it as a projection” (94). It is this freedom to construct reality that mass media offer by the very act of doing it themselves.

Luhmann then turns to a discussion of the functions of the mass media. He argues that the distinction between operation and observation is crucial: operation is a factual happening of events whereas observation is using distinction to describe something (95). Communication, he says, only comes about by being able to distinguish utterance and information in the process of self observation (96). Furthermore, the function of the mass media lies in the directing of self observation of the social system (97).

Luhmann argues that one cannot comprehend the reality of mass media if one sees it in terms of providing information and distorting reality, as if it could be otherwise (98). By constantly generating and processing information, the

mass media is doing exactly this, all the time. If we were to analyse it within a framework that idealises the role of the mass media as otherwise, we would be deceiving ourselves only. Luhmann says, "mass media has a special role; it arranges modern society in its execution of communication in an endogenously restless way". This restlessness services society by guaranteeing all function systems a present which is accepted throughout society and which is familiar (99). This present is presented through mass media's function of memory, "a constantly co-occurring discrimination of forgetting and remembering" (101) which is socially utilised by constantly linking the past and the future: a constantly reactivated internal test of consistency (102).

Luhmann notes that, while there is regulation and control over various aspects of mass media, as well as technological limitations on what media products can be produced and how, "there is no control over who pays attention to the products of mass media" (104). This is a particularly salient point that also highlights how it is impossible to measure or control exactly how the attention is paid to the products of mass media (or how the media products are read, used or interpreted).

He argues that a central function of mass media is not the production of but the representation of the public (105), which is essentially a contribution towards society's construction of reality, including a constant reactualisation of self-description (103). Mass media constantly reproduces itself as a system, and furthermore reproduces ideas of the future through its co-present distinctions of past and present. Mass media generates boundaries (106) with an inside and outside that are inaccessible to the public, in much the same way in which any text creates boundaries that are difficult to cross between author and reader. Nevertheless, these boundaries are constantly reassessed and challenged by the interaction of individuals with media. Luhmann says that "mass media produce a world in which individuals find themselves, where what is presented affects them. When individuals look at media as text or

image, they are outside; when they experience the results within themselves, they are inside” (115).

Luhmann concludes by reminding us that mass media is an operationally closed, and therefore, an autopoietic system (117). The media is so busy reproducing itself and the information that it processes that it is invisible to itself as an observer (118). He challenges us to consider the questions of how it may be possible to accept information about the world and about society as about reality when one knows how it is produced.

Media and the Hyperreal

No literature review of approaches to media studies would be complete without reference to Jean Baudrillard and his conceptions of the hyperreal and simulacra in relation to the media. In particular, elements of Baudrillard's theories sync effectively with some of Luhmann's positions, and as such a brief review of the media-related ideas of the former critic is quite a fitting conclusion to this chapter. Of Luhmann's many salient points, the most memorable in the context of Baudrillard is that the news can be understood as nothing more than a value-laden simulacrum for what actually happened. Recall Luhmann's comment that "it is not possible to have a point for point correspondence between information and facts" (Luhmann, 2000:27). It is clear that media offer fertile ground for research into the differentiation between actual facts and the manner in which they are interpreted into media information.

As Mark Poster suggests in his introduction to *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, Baudrillard "developed a theory to make intelligible one of the fascinating and perplexing aspects of advanced industrial society: the proliferation of communications through the media" (1988:1). This theory, the hyperreal, is interesting in that it relates directly to Luhmann's ideas of media as an autopoietic system, and therefore invisible to itself, as well as to the process of slippage in media's representations of reality.

In "Simulacra and Simulations", Baudrillard explains that the hyperreal is "models of the real without origin or reality; substitution of signs of the real for the real" (1988:166). He continues:

The age of simulation begins with a liquidation of all referentials – worse: by their artificial resurrection in a system of signs, which are more a ductile material than meaning, in that they lend themselves to all systems of equivalence, all binary oppositions and all combinatory algebra. It is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself; that is, an operation to deter every real process by its operational double, a metastable, programmatic, perfect descriptive machine which provides all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes. Never again will the real have to be produced: this is the vital function of the model in a system of death, or rather of anticipated resurrection which no longer leaves any chance even in the event of death (1988:167).

This substitution of signs of the real for the real is in essence, exactly what every instance of media does, selectively of course, on a day to day basis. Furthermore, this process of representation acts as an "operation to deter every real process by its operational double". This process is defined by a certain degree of slippage, because, as Baudrillard says, even though successful illusion stays as close to the truth as possible, it can never be exactly the same, otherwise "a perfect simulation may as well be real" (178). Baudrillard concludes that this means that there is no "real" because it is impossible to isolate its process, separate from that of the process of simulation of course (178); there is only the hyperreal. Media in specific "functions as a set of signs dedicated exclusively to their recurrence as signs, and no longer to their 'real' goal at all" (179). Whatever this real goal might be, fantasised as a democratic communicative ideal by some of the critics reviewed earlier perhaps, is irrelevant in the face of the fact that media is a set of hyperreal signs that continuously refer back to themselves and their own process of simulating reality:

It is as hyperreal events, no longer having any particular contents or aims, but indefinitely refracted by each other..., that [media] are precisely

unverifiable by an order which can only exert itself on the real and the rational, on ends and means: a referential order which can only dominate referentials, a determinate power which can only dominate a determined world, but which can do nothing about that indefinite recurrence of simulation ... (1988:179).

Later, in "The Masses: The Implosion of the Social in the Media", Baudrillard reviews the two main versions of media analysis: what he terms "the technological optimism of McLuhan" and the "dialectical optimism inspired by progressivist and Marxist thought" (1988:207). Both optimisms are misplaced, he argues, the former places its faith in the ability of technology to create a global village that will "inaugurate a generalised planetary communication" while the latter places its faith in the belief that the productive power of the media, is, or will be, in the hands of masses who will use it to explode the dominance of capitalism (207). Both approaches ignore the fact that "what characterises the mass media is that they are opposed to mediation" they are intransitive in that they fabricate noncommunication – if one accepts the definition of communication as an exchange (207). This relates to Baudrillard's conception of the hyperreal. If the media are, as he suggests, nothing more than a set of endlessly self-generating signs that refer back to themselves in a process of simulating reality, then it would be naïve to believe that they have either technological or revolutionary potential.

Baudrillard goes on to argue that the media "render impossible any process of exchange" (208) thereby forcing individuals into a homogenous mass (210). This has resulted in a loss of the other and therefore a loss of the sense of self:

This is our destiny: subject to opinion polls, information, publicity, statistics; constantly confronted with the anticipated statistical verification of our behaviour, and absorbed by this permanent refraction of our least movements, we are no longer confronted with our own will. We are no longer even alienated, because for that it is necessary for the subject to be divided in itself, confronted with the other, to be contradictory. Now where there is no other, the scene of the other, like that of politics and society, has disappeared (210).

What is this homogenised mass of the media audience to do in order to regain its sense of self in the face of this bombardment of one-way hyperreality? Baudrillard argues that it can, to put it simply, win the game by refusing to play. The masses can escape the reality of media through the hyperreal screen that the media project; and use this mode of alienation as a subversive escape route: disappearance (213). By recasting the media as deflective screen rather than a reflective mirror, Baudrillard argues that the masses are freed to carry on with their own lives at their own pace unscathed by the hyperactivities of the hyperreal.

Baudrillard concludes by pointing out that there always will be major difficulties in analysing media through traditional philosophies of the subject: will, representation, choice, liberty, deliberation, knowledge and desire. It is quite obvious, he says, that such philosophies are absolutely contradicted by the media, which alienates the subject's sovereignty (214). The masses are able to recover their sovereignty through a process of delegation of their wants and desires to the media, thereby freeing themselves and making the mediators their servants (216). The media therefore becomes the territory of the masses' strategic ruse to refuse the truth and deny reality (217). The addiction that we have for the media, says Baudrillard, is "not a result of a desire for culture, communication and information, but of this perversion of truth and falsehood, of this destruction of meaning in the operation of the medium. The desire for a show, the desire for simulation, which is at the same time a desire for dissimulation" (217).

In terms of ideas of audience, Baudrillard's constructions are indeed radical. Instead of casting the masses as disempowered and exploited players in the game of media as most analysts do, he casts them as snobbishly disinterested, subversive and deceptively empowered. The masses are able to slip through the cracks of media in order to continue with everyday life, largely unscathed – an argument that would go against the grain of many sociological researchers of media who take pains to demonstrate the negative

effects of the media on a specific focus group (be it children, women or marginalised ethnic minorities). Poster points out that in this formulation Baudrillard has ignored contradictory evidence that the masses as audience can also be subversively active, particularly in the case of new media (1988:7-8). The argument is also somewhat flawed in that it ignores the fact that the masses *buy* media objects. The economy of the media cannot be ignored. Money changes hands; magazines are purchased and TV satellites installed. The masses engage with and pay for the media, which makes it difficult to believe that the process of subversive, reflexive deflection is the only one at play.

Overall, Baudrillard's take on media is valuable in that it reminds us that there is more at stake in its analysis than merely issues of production and consumption, and audience or content analysis. There is a bigger picture that needs to be sketched in all of its hyperreal dimensions. Like Luhmann, who insisted that we need to assess the media within larger theories of reality and society, Baudrillard also encourages us not to be afraid of hyperbolic paradigms, for there can be value in them. Like Luhmann, who describes the media as a closed system intent on reproducing representations of reality, Baudrillard reminds us that the media is a hyperreal system, functioning only as an endlessly self-generating system of signs that continuously deflects reality.

Both Luhmann and Baudrillard draw the attention of media studies back to textuality. For what is textuality if not a system of signs, engaged in ongoing representations of other signs, posturing as the representation of reality? If both media and textuality are systems of representation, call them hyperreal if you will, and media is made up of an infinitely multiplying collection of texts, then it follows that this thesis will next need to explore the textuality of the media.

It will do this in two ways: Chapter 3 will describe the current snapshot of media texts that exist and discuss issues of textuality in media, while Chapter 4 will explore various inter-textual links between these discrete media texts. This discussion will demonstrate how important issues of textuality are in any discussion of media and lay the foundation for a discussion of supra-textual links and the megatext.

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"The text is a contested terrain and those who address it necessarily assume political positions in order to do so."

John Mowitt, *Text: The Genealogy of an Antidisciplinary Object* (10)

Chapter 3

The Media Matrix: The Multiplicity of Media as Text

At the crossroads of media and text it is important to acknowledge two things; firstly that media artefacts, or what I will term "instances of media," are texts, and secondly that there are always a large number of media (texts) concurrently in existence at any given moment.

It has long been accepted that every media artefact that exists is a text. John Mowitt's very useful 1992 book, *Text: Genealogy of an Antidisciplinary Object* is instrumental in any discussion of the text. He argues that "the text arose when the symbolic practices of mass culture began to saturate and redirect the institutionally channelled production of knowledge" (51). Before this, the text was a niche object that belonged to a very particular slice of formal disciplinary analysis. According to Mowitt, the text has gone "pop", a phenomenon closely linked to the fact that the "technologies of mass culture have reorganised human experience so profoundly that the legitimated institutional accounts of it have been reconfigured" (52). In other words, through the mass dissemination and availability of technology, the text has become an instrument of popular awareness; it has become an object of mass culture (53). Technology has allowed textuality to become a part of our everyday lives, and the mass media is connected closely with both the pervasion of technology in society and the communication of various messages throughout our daily lives. Furthermore, Mowitt argues that "we cannot separate the text from institutional dynamics of disciplinary power". Indeed, he points out that it was the "scandal of textuality" (54), the sudden conflation of almost every communicative message produced through some form of technology with textuality that both eroded the borders between official knowledge and commodity consumption (53) and undermined, once and for all, the concept of canonicity (54). There is today an intimate relation between

mass culture and textuality, to the degree that it could be suggested that almost everything that the average individual engages with, from a pop song on the radio to a billboard on the highway is a text. The text has indeed become an interdisciplinary, or beyond this, as Mowitt posits, an antidisciplinary object. He encourages us to consider how the text “introjects and articulates the logic of mass culture” (56), a question that may be answered in part by a conception of the media as megatext. The media has broadened the text of the cultural canon to such an extent that no one literate is excluded, indeed, Mowitt terms this process “mediacratism”, a pun on the process of the democratisation of texts that the media has facilitated, a democratisation that has both levelled the text’s playing field and allowed an “intrinsic polyvalence” (58) to come to the fore.

A text is essentially any product of conscious communicative effort. Therefore, almost every element of modern society, as well as non-“text” based texts such as entertainment artefacts like music, visual animation, fashion design, architecture and interior design can be analysed in textual manner. As Mowitt explains, “a text is a fragment, i.e. a limited field in which the limitless and reversible process of converting reading into writing transpires” (58). This could also be interpreted to mean the process in which writing (creating) is converted into reading (understanding). As has already been suggested, the collection of media texts that suffuse the market place and the mass mentality of most of the population could be termed the literature of our times – indeed, it could be argued that media are the texts that are read by the largest number of people, taking into account the specifically South African fact that the average person was not privileged enough to receive a high quality education and is most likely not interested in “high” academic or literary texts.

One of the most obvious and pertinent observations that one can make about the media is simply how many media texts exist. It may seem somewhat simplistic, but the almost infinite number of media texts that reach the marketplace every single day shows the breathtaking reach of this “literature

of our times". The matrix of media can be differentiated and categorised in a variety of ways, but the most relevant fact that will be gleaned from any manner of categorisation is the sheer size of the field of contemporary media. It is important to remember that although it is possible to group media according to their mode of production, or the outward characteristics of their appearance, such descriptions do not take the place of a definition nor do they have any other real theoretical relevance. The purpose of taking the opportunity to describe, as far as is possible given the ongoing transformation of the media, a "snapshot" of its current shape is useful in that it demonstrates an obvious, but important point, the multiplicity of media texts, and by extension the multiplication of media as Text.

Each instance of media, as I will refer to the individual and discrete publications, websites, radio and TV channels and shows that exist, is a text that contains language that has been specifically crafted by an author (or cast of authors as I will point out later) in order to communicate a specific message to an audience. Turning now to an illustration of the number of media texts that continuously co-exist, it may first be useful to outline the four defining characteristics that I will use to define media texts. These four characteristics are the media subject category; the media genre; the frequency of release to the public and the reach of distribution. These four factors combine in different ways depending on the specific instance of media under analysis.

Media Subject Categories

The type of information that the media communicates is broader even than the number of media artefacts that exist. Types of information covered by media could be termed "media subject-categories" (what Luhmann termed "programme strands" and divided into entertainment, news and in-depth reporting and advertising). I have identified the following media subject categories: news, consumer and niche, considering advertising a horizontal rather than vertical influence on media content. It is important to note the distinction between editorial and advertising: the former is content that is

researched and produced independently by the media owner, while the latter is paid-for content placed by external parties. The subject categories I have noted above are all editorial categories. I will discuss advertising and other horizontal influences on authorship in Chapter 5.

News media task themselves with transmitting up-to-date information about events and current affairs at the relevant level (local, regional, national or international) to their audiences. This subject group would include the current affairs in-depth reporting that Luhmann also points out.

Consumer media includes all entertainment subject matter, including fashion, beauty, wellness, travel, décor, etc., in other words, any field in which the reader is encouraged to become a consumer of the various luxury items on offer. This can often be very indirect, and would include subject matter such as sexuality and fitness, objects of desire which, although not packaged and ready to buy from the supermarket shelf, nevertheless are major players in the stakes of consumerism. In the main, consumer media fixates on ideas of hedonistic comfort, glamour, celebrity, fashion and beauty, hence deserving the catch-all tag of “consumer”. Mowitt (2000: 12) points out that Jameson argues that “the text’s preoccupations match those of an atomised society; inflected subgroups; multiplicity of codes all consistent with consumerism”, something that is all the more true when applied to contemporary consumer media.

Niche media are essentially speciality media: they communicate specialised information about a specific field, such as fishing, art, soccer or travel, to an audience of enthusiasts. Although these subject matters are also consumerist to a degree, they reflect a certain passion, a borderline obsessiveness even, which differentiates them from the broader consumerist media subject categories.

It is important to note that media subject categories are unfixed and unlimited – while some main categories are fairly standard and have remained similar for some time, new categories constantly arise and old categories are constantly redefined. Furthermore, simply because I have noted these subject categories does not mean that they are not overlapping and interdependent. For example, a newspaper, which is traditionally a news subject category, almost always has consumer elements, such as a fashion section or a lifestyle section. Also, traditionally consumer media such as women's glossies do sometimes break out of the mould with more news oriented feature items. Overall, the idea of media subject categories as a defining characteristic is meant to be broad, and it is always subject to nuances on the level of the individual content articles that make up each media product.

Media Genre

As well as the type of information communicated, media includes a broad variety of formats of communication, which I will refer to as “media genres”. Media genres are groups of media defined by their common production methodology, which relies on technology and the human capital capable of utilising this technology, and the format of the final media product. Media genres include print, broadcast and online media. Print media is defined by two substances, ink and paper, and its history begins with the invention of the very first printing press. The advent of the printing press in 1452² changed the face of mass literature forever. This machine, which allowed literature to be copied and dispersed without laborious hand-copying, ignited popular access to information and ideas and fanned the flames of the industrial and information revolutions. McLuhan says that the printing press was the “archetype of all subsequent mechanisation” and that “the typographic explosion extended the minds and voices of men to reconstitute the human dialogue on a world scale that has bridged the ages” (1994:170). Printing technology has progressed at a rapid pace since the invention of the

² See <http://communication.ucsd.edu/bjones/Books/printtech.html>. These technological innovations quickly changed mass communications. This website reports that “by 1501 there were 1000 printing shops in Europe, which had produced 35,000 titles and 20 million copies”.

moveable type that revolutionised the hand reproduction process. Today, newspapers and magazines are designed and printed digitally, with sophisticated computer-based technology allowing for the creation of full colour media items with strong visual elements. The reproduction of photography in particular has become a very intricate technology, or an art, as some of its practitioners would argue. An almost unimaginable eye for detail in the “repro” phase of printing ensures that every single photographic image is manipulated digitally before going to print in order to ensure that it matches the original subject matter (or the manipulator’s idea of how the original subject matter should look) as closely as possible.

Nowadays, most print media are either newspapers, be they broadsheet or tabloid size, and magazines, which are various sizes, from the “handbag” *Glamour* size through to large almost A3 formats. Newspapers and magazines are also distinguished by the quality of the printing and paper used. Generally, magazines are of better print and production quality, are more expensive and come out less regularly, while newspapers are distinguished by their low quality paper, more regular release and cheaper cover price.

Broadcast media is made up of radio, which is purely aural or sound broadcast, and television, which is a combination of both visual and aural broadcast. There are a variety of media categories for radio and television channels, and each channel carries a variety of shows dealing with various media categories or detailed sub-categories. Broadcast technology is incredibly expensive and requires a massive investment in terms of infrastructure and capital – which explains why most television and radio companies were initially parastatal organisations. South Africa experienced a boom in privately owned television and radio stations such as e.TV and YFM, in the early nineties, which indicates both that the technology became more accessible and that more capital was invested in acquiring it. Furthermore, major leaps in the development of satellite technology have made television in

particular a transfrontier experience, with the wealthy in almost every country able to gain access to television programming from other countries.

Online media consists of the World Wide Web (www) or internet and its ever-changing and infinite plethora of websites and their associated e-mail newsletters and advertisements. Online media is perhaps the cheapest to produce – it does not need the expensive and complicated technology required by print and broadcast media; one computer, an internet connection, the appropriate software and an individual with the requisite skills to programme binary code is pretty much all that is needed to produce an instance of web based media. This is clearly demonstrated by the growing abundance of websites and e-mail based communication artefacts that are produced every single day by the ever-growing community of World Wide Web users.

Frequency

Media can also be categorised by their frequency – in other words, how often the media texts are released to the public. The frequency can range from several times per day, such as in the case of a website that is updated throughout a twenty-four hour period or in the case of a radio or television advert that may, sometimes, be repeated several times within the space of an hour, through to magazines that only come out two or four times a year.

A crucial defining characteristic of media in terms of frequency therefore, is the fact that media texts are constantly renewing themselves. This is partly a result of the service that they see themselves as providing to the public, and mostly as a result of what Luhmann termed their autopoiesis, the constant need to produce new information by making the distinction between new and old crucial, the old therefore immediately redundant, the “news” therefore consistently prime. The frequency with which instances of media appear reveals both the amount of capital backing them as business operations and the role that they see themselves playing in society. News media, for

example, see their role as crucial, and therefore make it their *raison d'être* to keep their readers up-to-date on every possible development on any event considered newsworthy, hence their regular release. Consumer media, however, see their role as more of a leisure activity, something to keep their audiences in the buying frame of mind. This, in addition to the fact that there is a limited amount of new information consistently available in the consumer field (indeed, most of it is constructed information from marketing sources) translates to a less frequent release. Financial and technological factors also affect frequency, however. In the case of cheaper media, such as web based media, it is not expensive to constantly create new content. In the case of print media, where actual items such as ink and paper have to be purchased, as well as the human capital to create the content, updates are more expensive and take more time to translate into a product (such as in the case of a magazine, which requires a significant amount of time to put together a fashion editorial, for example) and therefore happen less frequently.

Frequency is therefore the result of a combination of factors, including the availability of financial and human capital, the amount of time it takes to produce the media product, and the role that the media owners see themselves as fulfilling in society.

Distribution Reach

The final defining characteristic of media is where it is distributed, be it locally, regionally, nationally or internationally. This will directly affect the kind of subject matter content that the instance of media carries. As Luhmann described, geographical relevance is a crucial factor in deciding what is considered news. When it comes to News media, the area in which the media product is distributed or sold is crucial when it comes to the type of content that they will print. Local community newspapers will only cover local community news, regional newspapers will only cover relevant regional news, national papers will only cover stories that are considered to have national significance and international publications will be sure to cover stories with

international relevance. Most broadcast media, with the exception of satellite channels, are either regionally or nationally confined.

An interesting aside, when it comes to a discussion of the distribution reach of consumer magazines, is that they are often local syndications of international titles, which means that they are locally produced versions of the original international title. More often than not, a significant percentage of the content in the local version is syndicated from international versions, or to be more crude, copied and reproduced by local actors. This raises an interesting aspect when it comes to questions of spatial reach – if a local magazine syndicates the content of its international parent title, is it simply increasing the reach of the original media product?

The internet, as usual, throws a spanner in the works of the description of distribution reach – the world wide web is globally accessible, which means that even if a particular website or internet news channel is specifically local in content, it can be accessed from anywhere in the world. If the media (as a megatext) is evolving in such a way as to break down even the defining factors that we create in order to categorise and understand it (breaking them down at times before they are even formed), where does this leave the formal study of a phenomenon that refuses to be formalised?

In order to illustrate the extent of media texts that coexist I have tabulated the defining characteristics of some of the print media products that coexist in South Africa (please refer to Appendix 1, *The Print Media Matrix in South Africa*). This table lists all newspapers (barring local community newspapers which total a further five hundred) and magazines that are produced and distributed in South Africa. The table has listed these media alphabetically, and then categorised them according to the four defining characteristics discussed above. It illustrates two pertinent facts, firstly that there are a lot of print media in operation in South Africa. It is certain that there are other print media products that escaped this list, or that more will emerge in the very near

future. Consider that every single other country in the world is likely to have a similar list, infinitely greater in the case of a country like the United States perhaps, infinitely smaller in the case of a country like Papua New Guinea, perhaps, but every country possesses a list of its many print media. Then, consider the fact that each instance of media on those lists will have discrete sections within it that could be defined as separate media products entirely – such as a lifestyle section in a newspaper, for example, or a monthly magazine supplement to a weekly newspaper³ – and the fact that each media product is made up of many subtexts, the various articles and feature pieces that appear within each media product. Already, the number of media texts that exists has grown exponentially merely in the sphere of print media. Then, consider that broadcast media and online media have similar lists of media products, each of which is made up of a variety of shows and segments. If it was possible to agree on the delimiting characteristics of which texts to count (only each media product or every text-article within each media product? only the TV channel or every show that it broadcasts as well as each advert that it broadcasts? only the current website page or its archives of past content?) and if it were then possible actually to count the number of media texts that exist, it is clear that the final tally would reach, indeed probably exceed, a million. It is likely that the world wide number of media texts that exist could extend well beyond a million into the domain of a billion.

The inevitably frustrating nitty-gritty of the numbers aside, what this hypothesis demonstrates is that there exists something that I would term a *chorus* of media texts. How else could we describe a phenomenon of so many texts coexisting, and often speaking the same “language” (in terms of national tongue or mode of discourse), using the same tools, covering similar subject matters? Were we able to attune our ears to the sounds of every single radio and television broadcast at once and affix our eyes simultaneously on the articles of every current newspaper and magazine in circulation, we would hear a deafening roar of voices and see an endless flow of ink on paper. The

³ Consider the monthly supplement to the *Mail & Guardian*, “*Leisure*” and the new monthly supplement to the *Business Day*, “*Wanted*”.

chorus of media is a reality, it exists, but due to the selectiveness of the reader and the blessings of time and space, and technology that we can switch off, if we wish, we are spared the oppression of the pervasive and ongoing roar of the media cacophony. Either that or we have evolved as creatures of information technology such that we are able to shut the chorus of media out, allowing it to remain the white noise of our daily lives, and only tuning in when we need to access information.

The exercise of describing the defining characteristics of media and illustrating these characteristics in a table has highlighted the complexity of the media landscape, something that has been clear since the beginning of this dissertation. It is this complexity that I find so fascinating, however, and I think that it is a strong support of the concept of the megatext. Every instance of media can be linked to every other instance of media through one or more of their defining characteristics. For example, some instances of media may appear in different genres, but make use of the same information in terms of their subject matter; others may differ entirely in terms of their subject matter but use the same materials and technology in order to create their media products; others may use completely different material and technologies, thereby manifesting in different genres, and cover entirely different subject matters, but reach the same temporal and spatial audience; others may be available to the public at the same time, and appear in similar media genres, but cover entirely different subject matters.

The most important observation when it comes to a description of the matrix of media is not that there is a need to map exactly how each and every instance of media is linked to every other one; this would be an exhausting and somewhat useless exercise. What is crucial to recognise however is the fact that *the matrix exists* and that it is very complex. The levels of overlap at this level of analysis, the external descriptive characteristics of the multitudes of media that form the ever expanding and mutating web of media, are breathtaking to behold. It is pointless to describe the various manifestations of

media unless a simultaneous observation is made about the ongoing metamorphoses that are contiguous with its many-faceted reality. It is equally useless to imagine that by successfully identifying a discrete instance of media's subject matter, genre, frequency and distribution reach that analysis is no longer necessary. In fact, there are overlaps within and between each of the distinguishing factors that I have already discussed. Within media genres, for example, it is very common to see instances of media branching out into different genre fields, for example, many print publications use the internet to publish web-based versions of their newspapers, and this is in fact becoming *de riguer* for the newspaper industry⁴. Many radio and TV broadcasters also use the internet as an archive⁵ or as an alternative or additional broadcast stream⁶ and/or send out e-mail newsletters. Ongoing technological developments make more and diverse overlap and integrated options available to media owners. Of course, media ownership also supersedes genres, with media owners typically owning instances of media of various genres, but I will leave the discussion of media ownership to the section that will follow in due course.

At this point it becomes clear that all instances of media are dependant on two factors in order to exist: technology and the creation of texts through the manipulation of language (both textual and visual). Media are therefore the products of a complex relationship between technology and language, a relationship which in many respects facilitated the inclusion of imagery in media literature. Language is no longer merely script-based, it is now highly visual, something that the media both engendered and perpetuates. Our culture has never been so highly visually literate, and this is in large part due to the explosion of media products in the marketplace. Technology facilitated the development of the image, formerly a domain reserved by high art and patronised by those with the means to leisure, into an arena of public consumption and participation. No instance or genre of media, save radio, is

⁴ See for example www.mg.co.za; www.businessday.co.za; www.star.co.za

⁵ See for example www.safm.co.za, the website of SAFM, where readers can access written transcripts of some of the radio stations interviews with personalities.

⁶ Audiences can now listen to most radio stations on the internet via streaming audio, such as at www.5fm.co.za and www.yfm.co.za.

complete without its visual element, which can be argued is often its strongest. In fact, even radio participates in the visual element of media through its corollary media instances, including its own advertising and online presence. Media are, in many respects, the literary off-spring of the industrial and technological revolutions, and the harbingers of a new visual revolution, a revolution that we are currently in the midst of; facts that are implicit to any understanding of media.

In *Understanding Media*, Marshall McLuhan explains media as the technological extensions of the senses of man; a medium as the extension of self (1994:8). Indeed, media have allowed us to see and hear and speak further than ever before, providing real time testimony and witness to events on the other side of the globe. Media allow us to hear diverse viewpoints and see things that would not ordinarily fit into our localised, self-centred notions of life or our contexts of home. To McLuhan, media is more than the collection of texts and technologies that characterise modern communication; they are any technological instance of communication that can carry a message or another medium. To McLuhan, therefore, electric light and a piece of paper are both media. As poetic and alluring as these ideas are, they are not entirely instrumental to my argument, and although I will return to McLuhan a little later in my discussion, it is pertinent to repeat here that when I mention media, I largely refer to media as commonly recognised in contemporary society and as discussed above – those newspapers, magazines, TV, radio and online products that together form the media matrix I have described above, the various voices in the overwhelming chorus of texts that characterises communication in modern-day society.

Linked to the fact that media are products of technology is the fact that media are products in the capitalistic sense of the term – media are things produced through technology *at a cost* in order to be sold *at a profit* to advertisers and readers. This fact cannot be avoided in any study of the media, and although some approaches to the field hold that media is a public service performed in

the interests of access to information and the support of democratic principles, without financial sustainability at the very least and consistent profit margins at the very most, media could not exist as semi-independent voices. The fact that media owners market their instances of media testifies to the existence of media as products. The marketing of media is apparent in their online presences, as well as in their above- and below-the-line advertising activities. Examples of the former are television station and magazine adverts in newspapers and vice versa (e.TV has purchased a particularly large amount of space in consumer newspapers recently, some of which appears to be in exchange for airtime publicising the newspapers in which its supplements appear), whilst the latter can be demonstrated through reference to the numerous consumer events, such as beach parties, cycle races and fundraising events, sponsored by media owners in order to expose their brand (e.g. 5FM beach parties, the Argus Cycle Tour, the 94.7 Cycle Race).

Analytical Problems Raised by the Media Matrix

The existence of the polyvalent media matrix raises a few analytical challenges in our quest for the megatext. Up to this point, we have identified several characteristics of the media matrix, characteristics that I have argued support the identification of media as a megatext. The main challenge that faces any analyst of the media is the fact that they are dealing with an ever-changing set of texts that do not conform to any set of hard and fast rules. The fact that the media environment is so free and fluid, a fact made all the more true by technological developments and political freedom of speech, is at once the media's greatest value and its most challenging quality. This ever-changing environment forces us to think on our feet, and to create analytical tools that are as flexible and fluid as the stuff of our analysis. In the course of developing the ideas in this thesis, I have come across some theoretical challenges that have stood in the way of the development of the idea of the megatext. While in no way suggesting that I have identified all the possible obstacles that exist (problems with media develop as fast as the media itself), a discussion of some of the obstacles that I have noticed appears below.

Prestige Media: Toeing the Marketing Line

Up to this point, I have defined media as essentially communicative artefacts produced by authors who consider themselves independent, that are at once texts and products, the latter quality exposing a certain capitalist mentality that underlies most media production. If a media product cannot be sold to readers or sell itself to advertisers, it is likely to fail. However, there are large numbers of media that are produced by corporate entities who can by no means represent themselves as independent, yet who have no direct profit motive attached to the production of the media product at all. These kinds of media include corporate websites and publications, and their motive is not sales and ad sales but marketing. Many companies and organisations produce their own media as an item of corporate prestige: for example, most airlines produce their own magazine, which functions both as in-flight entertainment for bored travellers and as a megaphone for their corporate philosophy. The magazines are given away to passengers, and in rare circumstances surplus copies are also sold through retailers. In the large part, the expensive procedure of producing the content and the product is written off as a marketing expense. To be fair, airline magazines in particular do also contain advertising, and while it is plausible that certain costs are recouped through these ad sales, it is more likely that the expense of producing such prestige media is greater than the income it is able to generate.

Other examples of prestige media are the *Mini Magazine* – a quarterly produced by the revamped car company that has all the trappings of a glamorous lifestyle magazine – and the Camper magologue *The Walking Society* – another handbag sized creative and literary “journal” produced by Spanish shoe brand Camper. Italian fashion label Pal Zileri also produces an “intellectual” literature and lifestyle journal called *Notebook on Style*. While these publications come across as almost entirely editorially independent, often containing superb quality content from respected writers and

photographers, the fact that they are corporate marketing ploys to attract consumers to the brands cannot be overlooked.

In terms of web-based media, many companies are also turning to media mimicry to sell their products. Consider www.fa.com. Fa is a European range of toiletries: shower gels, deodorants and soaps. Their website is more than simply a catalogue and description of their products – it is dressed up as a lifestyle information hub, with a lot of “lifestyle” news and information about sport, fashion and design dressed up in Fa corporate colours. The website is clearly intended to attract readers (probably the majority of people) who are more interested in a new place to go skiing than the three variations in which a particular shower gel might be available.

It is at these points that the fine line between media and marketing becomes even finer and it becomes clear that prestige media is, in fact, a very effective manner of marketing dressing itself up as media. As media analysts, are we to be wary of such “magologues” or are we to conflate them with the traditional, “independent” media products produced by companies whose focus is the creation of media products? To be sure, the rise of the magologue has demonstrated not only that marketing can be effective as media, but also, crucially, that media can be effective as marketing. The only difference between *Cosmopolitan*, for example, and *Notebook on Style*, is that the former encourages us to buy many brands of clothing and the latter encourages us to buy only Pal Zileri.

Whether or not magologues and other corporate publications (including flashy websites) are part of the megatext is a difficult question, and I don't think that it can be answered hastily. This is perhaps a question that should only be approached once we have agreed that the term megatext is valid and useful. Nevertheless, an awareness of the existence of corporate prestige media is crucial as we forge methods of approaching the analysis of the media.

The Editorial/Advertising Divide

Luhmann was right in identifying advertising as a media programme strand. However, his treatment of the media programmes strands was such that advertising almost appeared to exist as media texts independent of the news and entertainment media products. It is crucial to understand that advertising and other marketing imperatives are not separate at all from editorial texts; in fact, the two genres (editorial, split into news, consumer and niche subject categories as I have suggested above, and advertising) are intricately linked. In order to avoid repetition of a discussion that will be made in much more depth in the sub-section "Horizontal Influences on Authorship" in Chapter 5, suffice it to say that a challenge facing the analysis of media is the realistic treatment of how marketing has invaded and continues to influence media. Indeed, the myth of editorial independence has been dealt with by many analysts, including those reviewed in the first section. The consequences of the entrenched role of corporate marketing imperatives in the authorship of media texts are equally important.

When the Medium is not the Message

When it comes to discussion of media texts, it would be very easy to fall into the McLuhanesque trap of the "medium is the message" particularly if pains have been taken to describe the various technological genres in which media can be manifested. It would be very easy to decide that the genre of television, or print, for example, defines the essence of the messages contained therein. Now, while I am certainly not suggesting that there is no link between the medium and the message, Mowitt in fact reminds us that "the shape and rigour of a thought is marked by its venue" (1992:71), I am pointing out that there are intrinsic problems with relying on a paradigm that insists on the conflation of the medium and the message, something that it is easy to do in a field named *media*. The medium certainly impacts on the message and shapes it, indeed; specific types of messages could be thought to be specific to certain genres, such as the sitcom to television, the music track to the radio, the fashion photographic spread to the glossy magazine and the

interactive quiz to the website. However, these kinds of patterns are not reliable because they are not static – technology is progressing at a rate so rapid that new channels for messages are appearing all the time. As well as this, technology has made cross-genre content possible – one can listen to the radio on a satellite TV connection or on the internet and one can watch video clips online and its not unlikely that fairly soon we'll be able to watch TV shows on our cell phones (we can already listen to the radio and access the internet from our cell phones). In this thesis I have made a particular effort to avoid conflating messages with the media in which they are transmitted and rather to focus on picking up on the various structural, inter-textual and supra-textual threads that make up the fabric of the megatext. For this reason, although I was originally tempted only to draw on practical examples from one genre of media, print, in the illustration of my points, I have decided to avoid this trap and draw on the most appropriate examples from whichever genre of media they originate.

Fact and Opinion

Another challenge posed by the description of the media matrix is intrinsic in subject matter. Although I will delve into this in more depth when considering the inter-textuality of media, at this point it is worth pointing out that as well as the various subjects categories that instances of media concern themselves with, i.e. news, consumer and niche information as described above, all media subject categories are stratified by layers of fact and opinion. Virginia Woolf termed media “the literature of fact and opinion” (1986:110) and this point is illustrated in the manner in which all instances of media offer information that is presented either as objective fact or subjective opinion, but either way so “important” that it needs to be shared with the reading public. Mowitt (1992:63) argues that through the intrusion of the economy on the public sphere through the media, “private opinions acquire social legitimacy”. Interestingly, it is often suggested that the media is a public space where information that is not factual is dressed up as such, and where opinions are inflated into massive ideas with the weight of “social legitimacy” and that through these twin

processes, the “truth” is distorted. To return to one of Luhmann’s central points, it is important to remember that one cannot approach the study of the media in a manner that suggests that it distorts the truth in the execution of its activities *as if it could be otherwise*. For any process that involves the translation of a thought into a text immediately loses the connection with truth; all texts, including media texts, are incapable of representing *exactly* that which they communicate. As is now commonly accepted in approaches to textuality, neither fact nor opinion, therefore, can be relied upon as truth, and anyone who approaches the study of media with the idea that there exists some kind of absolute, representable and objective truth in society that it is the media’s duty to communicate to the public will be sorely disappointed. It is exactly this now rather commonplace assumption that necessitates the search for new literary tools with which to analyse media; tools that recognise the innate textuality of media and the innate tensions and schisms that coexist along with and within textuality. Furthermore, when ideas of textuality are applied to mass media, with an emphasis on the *mass* nature of media, it becomes apparent that the tools that we use to analyse discrete media texts are insufficient when considering the phenomenon as a whole.

When we approach the media from the angle of the megatext it is important to remember that fact and opinion when presented and represented in media texts are no more or less objective or true than the arrangement of words and ideas in poetry and fiction.

At this point, having described the matrix of media that is a reality of everyday life and some of the analytical challenges that the matrix of media has posed to the development of the idea of the megatext, it would be appropriate to move on to a discussion of inter-textual nature of media.

“Texts do not confine themselves to artistic tasks, but reflect within themselves the social and philosophical dramas of their times.”

Ken Hirschkop, *Mikhail Bakhtin: An Aesthetic for Democracy* (14)

Chapter 4

Mass Media: the Ultimate Inter-text

Textuality has long since been understood as a phenomenon that is more than simply aesthetic, it is, rather, a phenomenon that carries with it profound social, political and economic baggage, along with its aesthetic load. Inter-textuality is one way of understanding the inter-disciplinary approach that we take to assess texts. It could be argued that the mass media matrix is the ultimate example of inter-textuality, or, as Kristeva terms it, transposition. As well as the various external characteristics that relate media texts to one another, there are almost limitless examples of inter-textuality that demonstrate the multiplicity of threads that link instances of media to one another. At this point, as an introduction to the concept of inter-textuality, it is worth quoting from Julia Kristeva at some length:

The passage from one sign system to another comes about through a process of displacement and condensation, but this does not account for its total operation. It also involves an altering of the thetic position—the destruction of the old position and the formation of a new one. The new signifying system may be produced with the same signifying materials; in language for example, the passage may be made from narrative to text. Or it may be borrowed from different signifying materials ... The term inter-textuality denotes this transposition of one (or several) sign system(s) into another, but since this term has often been understood in the banal sense of “study of sources” we prefer the term transposition because it specifies that the passage from one signifying system to another demands a new articulation of the thetic—of enunciative and denotative positionality. If one grants that every signifying practice is a field of transpositions of various signifying systems (an inter-textuality), one then understands that its “place” of enunciation and its denoted “object” are never single, complete, and identical to themselves, but always plural, shattered, capable of being tabulated. In this way, polysemy can also be seen as the result of a semiotic polyvalence—and adherence to different sign systems. ...

Transposition is the signifying process' ability to pass from one sign system to another, to exchange and permute them ...[,] it implies the abandonment of a former sign system, the passage to a second via an instinctual intermediary common to the two systems, and the articulation of the new system with its new representability (1984:59-60).

In the first place, it is clear that many media products make use of the same signifying materials, whether we consider these materials literal, such as paper, ink, film, computer technology or digital memory space, or figurative, such as the use of language and images. Furthermore, the media use the same signifying structures of meaning to transmit their messages. News stories in various print media typically use the structure of the headline to draw attention to the story, for example. The passage of this sign system from one instance of media to another is certainly an element of transposition. Another interesting manner in which signs appear in several media texts at once is through the simultaneous capturing of them. When a news story breaks, competing media companies send their own staff out to capture images and stories, leading to a situation where several media instances are broadcasting slightly different visual versions of the same happening, with the difference in viewpoint related almost directly to where the relevant cameraperson was positioned when capturing them. The fact that several media are simultaneously reporting on the same story makes for an interesting case of transpositional redundancy.

Consider the newspaper coverage of the case of the shark attack in Fishoek, Cape Town in November 2004. All the major daily papers carried front page stories which essentially showed photographs of the victim of the attack and of sharks in the ocean (see Appendix 2). This is an example of the most obvious kind of inter-textuality that occurs in the media – the same information is repeated in various media at the same time, gleaned from the same sources, but written up by different staff reporters, using the same style and tone of reporting. Consider the information in each of the stories as well – very little differs in terms of content. In the case of media then, at this level of inter-

textuality, it is a case of ongoing repetition, especially of high profile, dramatic stories such as the shark attack story, which lend themselves to repetition and transposition across many instances of media. The pattern that is evident in the news coverage of the shark attack story is evident in media coverage of any high profile news story, be it a natural disaster, political or crime story. And, the stranger and more out of the ordinary the story is, the more likely it is to be repeated over and over again in various media.

Jacques Derrida says that “pure repetition, were it to change neither thing nor sign, carries with it an unlimited power of perversion and subversion” (1978:373) but it is clear that the kind of repetitive redundancy that takes place within the media is not pure repetition, it is mediated repetition that tries to mask itself as newness. It is worth returning briefly to Luhman, who reminds us that “every act of communication creates social redundancy – to the extent that mass media spreads information so broadly that one can assume that everyone knows it. ... This redundancy serves a purpose – it generates a need to replace redundant information with new information (which will quickly also become redundant)” (2000:20-21). The social buzz created by the shark attack story for example, meant that everyone did indeed know enough about the story to be talking about it, even people who had not read the extensive articles shown in Appendix 2. The media makes its information pervasive by the mere act of repeating it.

Secondly, even in the banal sense of inter-textuality as the study of sources, the media is rich in examples of texts that have been created from information and patterns that rely heavily on other texts. An obvious example would be book, movie and CD reviews, something that is pretty standard in most news and consumer media. In the case of feature articles and programmes however, the producers typically rely heavily on various sources of information in order to patch together their stories. In fact, it is considered good journalism to research and cite as many sources as possible in order to offer “every side” to the story. Media are the texts that tell us about other texts; it is the role of

the media to “inform and educate the public” about other systems of knowledge. In many senses then, media act as the key to inter-textuality.

All of these aspects of inter-textuality are evident even in individual media texts within media products. The entire media product, however, is also an excellent example of the kind of polysemy within the text that Kristeva talks about. Discrete media texts are indeed “shattered and plural”; their very make up is fragmented and pieced together. Every media text, be it a newspaper, a radio programme, a TV show or a magazine, contains a huge variety of other texts within it. In the case of a newspaper or magazine, these texts-within-the-texts would range from feature articles to product reviews to adverts. In terms of radio and television shows, the texts would range from music clips, to talk shows, to interview to adverts. All of these texts exist at the same time within the same framework, and while sometimes they are overtly related to one another, such as in a themed issue of a magazine, at other times they relate to one another purely through the process of juxtaposition. Nevertheless, what occurs is a type of polysemy, a simultaneous adherence to different sign systems within a larger system. Consider for example the various sections of a typical newspaper. The news section will offer stories about relevant happenings in the world related to politics, crime and other socio-political stories; the business section will offer news in the economic, business and financial sectors; the lifestyle section will offer information on consumer-based issues such as fashion, food and travel; and the opinion section will allow certain established journalists or editors to have their say about certain issues. Each of these sections in the newspaper has its own structure for delivering news, yet they all take place within the structural boundaries of the newspaper, and are ultimately under the control of the editor. Similarly, although the content of each story does not necessarily relate to every other story, the way that they are unified in the total presentation of the media artefact inevitably leads to inter-textual links.

The text then, according to Kristeva, is a place of productivity and connectedness; it is site of the constant pluralisation of narrative and meaning. More than this, however, the text is the product of the constant pluralisation of meaning between various sign systems. Transposition names the passage of signs from text to text, the fact that “writing is made up of a mosaic of fragments of other writing, drawing on, redirecting and reflecting the myriad discourses that circulate in society at any given time” (Kristeva, 1980:95). This refers, in many ways, to any writer’s debt to the texts that came before his or hers, and illustrates that any text “is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (Kristeva, 1980:96). This position is supported by McLuhan, who contends in his discussion of the medium and the message in *Understanding Media* that “no medium has its meaning or existence alone, but only in constant interplay with other media” (McLuhan, 1994:26).

The analogy of a mosaic is in fact a very useful one in the assessment of the inter-textuality of media. In the most literal sense, the layout of the newspaper, for example, is constructed as a mosaic, with various and often entirely unrelated pieces of information placed alongside one another, thereby forcing context and relativity. (See Appendix 3 for an example of the mosaic-like layout of media artefacts. The example shows a typical double page spread from a national daily newspaper, the *Business Day*. As the blue borders indicate, there are 27 individual media texts, two of them adverts, within the two pages. The news items are contextualised by the heading at the top of each page – “National Economy & Business” and “National News” but aside from the fact that these media sub-texts share the identifying qualities that caused them to be considered “news” by the authors, there is very little substantive content that links the information together.) This mosaic-like nature of media artefacts is interesting in that it reveals the short attention span that the media assume that their readers have. It is commonly believed amongst media producers that their readers are not always interested in

reading too much, so information is packaged in bite-size chunks and made to look as appealing and interesting as possible.

Similarly, a news report is not a news report, nor is a feature article a feature article, without verbatim quotes from relevant parties involved in the event being reported, and each is therefore in many ways a patchwork of facts sourced from various places. Furthermore, it is an established media practice that all articles refer to other, previous, related events in order to contextualise current reports. As well as this inter-textuality within the layout of the media and the reliance on other sources of information in order to compile an accurate story, images are often obtained from a variety of sources, aside from in-house photographers. In entertainment media specifically, many images used to illustrate articles are purchased from image banks, commissioned from freelance illustrators, or dug out from in-house archives, and are more often than not entirely unrelated to the article with which it is contextualised.

In the study of media as in literature, many references to other texts within texts can be noted. In fact, without the guarantee of inter-textuality, media owners and developers would face a serious lack of resources with which to compile their publications. A significant percentage of any regional or national newspaper receives much of its content from other newspapers through a process called syndication, whereby the rights to re-publish already published articles and stories are sold to sister or non-competing publications. Syndication is, in fact, a prime example of the passage of texts (and portions of text) from one sign system to another. Some large international news agencies such as Reuters and Associated Press make it their business to source and write stories without publishing them for the public directly, preferring to make their money through selling off their images and reports, as well as video footage, to local titles or broadcasters. Likewise, many national magazines syndicate work from their international namesakes. Syndication is also interesting because it is an economic process – publications have to pay

the source publications for the right to republish the original article. Syndication could therefore perhaps be considered the formalised capitalist version of inter-textuality. As Mowitt says, “theorising the text means entering its symbolic economy” (1992:128), but clearly the text has its financial economy too.

The process of syndication is by no means the only way in which media texts are “absorbed and transformed” from sign system to sign system. It is common for media articles also to be dispersed in entirely informal ways, particularly through internet technology. Consider the following hypothetical (although entirely probable and probably commonplace) situation: an article is first published by a national newspaper in one country. The article is then republished on that newspaper’s website. The article is then quoted in a follow-up opinion piece by a writer of differing opinions in the following week’s newspaper and then its website. The original article is then copied off the website by an admirer and e-mailed to a group of contacts. This e-mail is read and forwarded on by a number of the recipients of the e-mail. In the meantime, the original article has been syndicated to several other newspapers in other countries. At the same time, the article has been mentioned and discussed on a radio talk show. Then, the article is copied and printed as reading material for a group of students and posted on a university intranet for students to access. Later, the article is quoted in several letters to the editor as well as in an online newsroom discussion. Two months later, a new article by the same writer dealing with the same topic appears in a news magazine. The occasions of transposition could go on indefinitely, and in the world of media it does, for an infinite variety of topics and articles. A more telling, relevant and real-time example of inter-textuality would be difficult to imagine.

It is clear therefore that the media is not only a prime example of the pervasiveness of inter-textuality in the contemporary socio-literary landscape,

but that without it, the media would not be able to function as it does. The media is intimately dependant on inter-textuality in order to survive.

Mowitt (1992) argues that Kristeva's take on the text is a "translinguistic apparatus that redistributes the order of language by relating communicative speech to different types of anterior and synchronic utterances" (105). He positions Kristeva's arguments that the text is redistributive and inter-textual (106) in relation to the manner in which the text exposes language to its own limitations (107) and captures the way that language both constructs positions for speakers and subverts those speakers by disclosing the "merely" symbolic character of such positions (108). In the case of the media this self-fulfilling and self-subverting manner of constructing text and positioning them alongside one another reveals, indeed, that language (and therefore text and therefore media) is the "mediating tissue of the mode of production" (108).

Mowitt then connects the productivity of the text with its "own internal heterogeneity" (110) which allows it to "register the presence of many discourses in the space of a particular artefact" (110). The relation of inter-textuality to productivity is conceived of according to the notion of transposition, he continues (110). Mowitt's argument is constructed within the framework of transdisciplinary practice, or as he terms it, antisciplinary practice. He says that although textuality presupposes a socio-cultural domain organised by a transdisciplinary practice, it refuses to abandon literary/aesthetic practice (112) – a comment that is very significant to the study of media, which has too often been approached from a socio-cultural perspective and too rarely approached from a purely textual perspective. Media is indeed, as Mowitt puts it, "a matrix within which intertextual signifying practises at once engage and outdistance particular texts" (112). And, like all texts, media texts are also the sites of "ongoing permutation" (111), something that is consistently evident in the field of media.

Dialogism and Heteroglossia

It is also useful to consider media in the framework of Bakhtinian heteroglossia and dialogism. Ken Hirschkop's 1999 review of Bakhtin's philosophy in the context of democracy is a useful starting point for a discussion of how the concept of dialogism is relevant to media. To start with, Hirschkop outlines the characteristics of dialogues and dialogism, the former being acts of communication that involve multiple actors or participants; the latter being a "philosophical idea; a characterisation of our experiences of meaning" (4). Dialogism highlights the intersubjective quality of all meaning: it is always found in the space between expression and understanding (4). According to Hirschkop, the role of dialogue in democratic life is generally understood as a "negotiative give and take, a debate aimed at compromise" (8), something that is central to the idea of liberal democracy. As we all know, media are enacting tools for this kind of dialogue, theoretically allowing this dialogue about public life to include the broadest possible spectrum of citizen. But beyond this, Bakhtin posited that "language itself is inherently dialogical: a living utterance cannot avoid becoming a participant in social dialogue" (Hirschkop, 1999: 9). Bakhtin used the genre of the novel to demonstrate how the dialogical is embodied in the textual (11). Dialogism is essentially a form of intersubjectivity that finds itself worked out in historically concrete shapes within the text (10), something that is likewise illustrated in media texts.

A very interesting point raised by Hirschkop, and something that is particularly relevant to the modus operandi of this thesis, is the fact that "Bakhtin never subjects any text to a prolonged analysis – his manner of analysing the novel is to show 'new forms of representation' with far more literary significance by defining the novel as a stylistic phenomenon. Bakhtin licenses the mix of philosophical generalisation and brief punctual illustration" (14). This point, aside from its obvious relevance to an understanding of the philosophy of Bakhtin, also hopefully licenses a similar pattern at play in the development of this argument. Hirschkop goes on to say that Bakhtin "constitutes the novel not as a set of texts, but as the embodiment of both a historical situation and

the critical principle which might address it" (14). The same could very well be said of media, as a megatext: it certainly does embody a cross section of historical situations – one of the easiest ways to get some insight into any historical period (be it two months or two decades ago) is to take a look at the media artefacts of the time. As Hirschkop explains, "texts do not confine themselves to artistic tasks, but reflect within themselves the social and philosophical dramas of their times" (14) – something that is entirely evident in the media, which could be compared to massive, many-faceted mirrors that reflect our contemporary obsessions in a myriad of ways.

As Bakhtin himself says, "For the consciousness living in it, language is not an abstract system of normative forms but a concrete heteroglot opinion on the world. All words taste of a profession, a genre, a movement, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, a day and hour" (Hirschkop, 1999:19). This multiplicity of languages, this omnipresence of many voices in every utterance and text is certainly apparent in the media. All words in the media do, indeed, taste of particular people, professions, generations, age groups and times. It is this kind of intrinsic dialogue that Bakhtin identified in the novel, and it is clear that a similar kind of media dialogue also exists. The media are also highly proficient in code-switching (Hirschkop, 1999:19), something that lies very close to Kristeva's concept of transposition. Indeed, the media are adept at switching languages and codes very quickly. As new happenings occur, the appropriate jargon and languages that match the happening are quickly adopted by the media. These differences of language, these discrete and sometimes competing voices, cannot be neutral, says Hirschkop, in fact, "they determine fundamental aspects of the organisation of speech; fix the roles that parties play in composition and define audiences" (1999:19).

Hirschkop goes on to argue that heteroglossia, "the internal stratification of a unified national language into a multiplicity of linguistic styles, jargons and dialects differentiated by various social pressures and contexts" (22) has

philosophical consequences for any theory of language and aesthetic consequences for the novel, and by implication for all texts, including media. Bakhtin saw the novel as “artistically organised social heteroglossia” (23) and one wonders if he wouldn’t have applied a very similar structure to the present day media matrix. The relationship between power and language finds its fulcrum in the site of the media, particularly patterns of authorship, something that I will discuss further later. Hirschkop points out that the media, or as he terms it rather naïvely, “journalism”, binds the nation together at a level of feeling and imagination (27). Nowhere is this more apparent than in the media’s coverage of the activities of various national sports teams – patriotism in the media reaches fever pitch when national sports teams play in any major international tournament.

The locus of media as the space for public discussion is also key. Hirschkop suggests that “contemporary arguments over democracy are arguments over structures of expression” (33). He goes on to say that democracy is inseparable from the discourse (systems of language) that makes it possible and that conceptions of language and discourse structure democratic principles from within (45). Nowhere are conceptions and structure of language more apparent in the modern democratic system than the media – the voicepiece of “the people”, the sphere in which many voices come to the fore and are able to be heard. To Bakhtin, dialogism of the novel appealed because it showed what history can do and what it has done to linguistic interchange; and highlights what new possibilities and dangers populate the modern discursive world (49). Similarly, tensions between modernity, democracy and dialogue (49) are most apparent in the most pervasive genre of modern literature: media.

Another crucial point that Hirschkop makes is that “dialogues do not stand suspended: they move and the nature of their motion is part of their meaning” (227). This is the point at which dialogism and transposition meet, and the ongoing state of flux and change that characterises the media is indeed

evidence of both of these phenomena. As is also particularly clear in media, “the participants in dialogue are simultaneously the actors and the authors of their drama” (227) – in fact, the “heroes” of various stories that reach the public imagination through the media are often partial authors (information sources) of their own representations. Hirschkop also highlights Bakhtin’s interest in the mechanism of narrative, as key to the authorial perspective (I will deal with the problem of media authorship later) and as representative of the dialectic of the author and the text (227). Bakhtin believed that what distinguished novels were their heroes, which were not persons or characters but socio-ideological languages, something that is equally apparent in the media. The language of consumerism has triumphed in consumer media, and the language of whichever dominant political power is controlling the press conferences is generally dominant in the news media. Therefore, heteroglossia only comes to the fore through narrative (228). Narrative is crucial, because, as Bakhtin says, “essential to narration is a moment of notification, the communication of something new, unknown, unexpected, strange, curious and so forth. The violation of taboo, of the norm, of the prohibition, crime, error, and so on – such are the objects of narration” (Hirschkop, 1999: 229). This relates directly to the kind of qualities that make a story newsworthy in media texts, as Luhmann pointed out, the five selectors of news: surprise/newness, conflicts, quantities, local relevance and norm violations. These indicators of newsworthiness are nothing less than narrative tools, which allow various voices to come to the fore, although generally controlled by the structuring hand of the author.

Hirschkop explains the importance of narrative in our political consciousness in terms of the ability to create histories (stories), something with which we identify power: “Making history is when actions are bound together as a coherent story” (245). He continues by pointing out that these narratives are available in a variety of texts besides novels, Bakhtin’s genre of choice, including media texts. In fact, I would argue that media texts are the most

widely available texts through which we structure our narratives and therefore our histories.

Heteroglossia or “different speech-ness” is, therefore, the representation of many different types of language and discourse within one text. Bakhtin’s concept of viewing the novel as a representation of the diversity of social speech types (Morris, 1994:114) is equally relevant when applied to an understanding of media, which is, if nothing else, a willing sponge to the nuances of spoken language and the evolution of social speech types and a forum in which many voices are represented. Headlines commonly include puns referring to contemporary slang phrases, whilst vernacular turns of phrase are commonly included in the language of the media alongside specialised jargon and professional terminology.

Furthermore, Bakhtin’s concept of the dialogue between discourses is one that is entirely evident in the media. In the first place, there is dialogue and often conflict, albeit implicit, between different genres of media, for example between the so-called intellectual high-brow newspapers and the tabloid papers aimed at the less educated masses. There is likewise dialogue and competition between various instances of media, as they compete to achieve market share and to get stories first – this despite the syndication of stories and partnership between sister publications (those publications owned by the same media owner). There is also dialogue within each media text, as has been discussed already, as a variety of different opinions are buffered and contrasted with one another, often within one story in an attempt to provide the “objective” story. (See Appendix 4 for an example of a news story that quotes several sources.) Experts with differing opinions are often invited to square up against one another, be it on a radio or TV talk show or within the more considered centimetres of the column. Readers and listeners have their chance to voice opinions too, with interactivity being a hallmark of modern media. Whether the viewer is sending a cellular text message to vote off the latest victim in a reality TV show, calling into the talk radio station to air an

opinion, enter a competition or request a track, or writing a letter to the editor expressing support or outrage on a particular position, there is no doubt that an essential aspect of the media is its innate ability to host many voices in one space. The internet is also a prime example of the ability of media to host many voices at one time – chat rooms are the obvious example, but more formal environments are apparent on websites that allow users to post comments on articles written by journalists⁷, something that is leaps and bounds ahead of the one way flow of information and ideas in newspapers, for example. Multivocality, or heteroglossia, is indeed an important defining characteristic of the media as a text.

Bakhtin's concepts of the stratification and hybridisation of language (Morris, 1994:115) are equally relevant. Media is in fact a prime example of how language is stratified into various genres, such as the professional and the social. Niche publications rely heavily on jargon and the language of expertise, while the tabloid newspaper genre relies heavily on the everyman language of the majority of the population. On the other side of the coin, media style draws substantially on hybridisation, where more than one social language is mixed within the same utterance. Articles and reports often rely on the introduction of niche jargon into everyday language; the media is a powerful force in the everyday expansion and hybridisation of language. Consider how many people understood the term "internet banking" two decades ago, as opposed to now, in no small measure due to the media's interest in recent security threats online, or the mainstreaming of terms like "kwaito" and "mzantsi", which may have been considered ethnically exclusive terms a few years ago, but which are now part of the every day dialect of most South Africans.

Media also stratifies and hybridizes *meaning* – and is very powerful in the massaging of meaning whereby new connotations for words and phrases are

⁷ See, for example, www.marketingweb.co.za, where anyone, within seconds, can post their comments on an article and thereby engage with the writer of the article, who will often reply, as well as fellow readers – which often allows for vibrant debate and discussion.

naturalised into politically charged narratives that impact on the development of language in society. The media can be likened to a sponge that not only absorbs a variety of languages and styles, but often also the political intentions behind such language. A prime example of this is the widespread media use of the term “war” during the recent Iraqi invasion, which was clearly an American propaganda term to cloak the reality of what was not a “war” but an “invasion”.

Earlier on in this thesis I suggested that the simultaneous co-existence of so many media texts could be likened to a chorus of media. What the above discussion of transposition and heteroglossia has also shown is that there is an ongoing exchange of chorus *between* media as well as *within* media. A hybridised multivocality is apparent within each media text, in the passages of exchange between the media texts and in the greater systems of signs that all media texts are a part of. What has been demonstrated so far is the massive variety of voices that speak simultaneously in, within and between the media. Aside from the fact that all of these voices speak at the same time, often repeating information from one to the other, a strong unifying factor as it is, what other qualities link these various and discrete media texts into the fabric of the megatext? While some analysts would be critical of my approach, perhaps accusing me of conflating media items too diverse and differentiated to study under the rubric of the megatext, such as a documentary film and a teenage girls magazine or an internet chat room and a daily newspaper, I would argue that as well as the various inter-textual links that I have discussed above, there are two other crucial systems that knit together the fabric of the megatext. The first is media discourse and the second is what I will term “supra-textuality” and which I will discuss at more length in the next chapter of this thesis.

The Discourse of Media

Let us first deal with a discussion of media discourse. Mowitt cautions us that in the project of trying to finish theorising the text (or the megatext for that

matter) we should remember that it is not the task of finishing discourse (1992:15). Instead, he points out that it was the historical institutionalisation of textuality that conditioned the emergence of discourse (15). He refers to Laclau, who framed discourse as the “ensemble of phenomena in and through which the social production of meaning takes place” (15). He cautions that discourse is neither a dimension, level nor superstructure of the social but is something that is co-extensive with it. He explains that there is nothing specifically social which is constituted outside of the discursive and that history and society are an infinite text. Mowitt goes on to describe discourse as the structure that is typically used to characterise the medium and nature of society (16). Discourse, then, could be understood as the fabric from which text “garments” are cut. And the most pervasive text artefacts that exist in contemporary society being instances of mass media, it makes sense that the discourse of media is the contemporary discourse of the social. Media, therefore, could be understood as the nature and medium of society – the self-reflective yet manipulable fabric that allows society to speak of and to itself.

Later, Mowitt argues that “the sociogenesis of the notion of textuality ought to be seen as an effort to negotiate the frontiers of cultural interpretation that open up once the clarity provided by the determinacy of the economic base had been overrun by the forces of social transformation” (78). In other words, media discourse is influenced both by the forces of social transformation, which could be pegged as cultural and political forces, and determinate economic forces, which I will deal with in more detail in the discussion of supra-textuality.

Discourse could also be understood as the fabric of the text, a notion introduced by Derrida. This was, essentially, says Mowitt, the relinquishment of a strictly literary reading of textuality (93) and the conflation of the text with everything; that there exists nothing outside of the text (94). Mowitt explains this by saying that it is not “just because anything could be read as a text that

nothing is outside the text. Rather, it is because reading necessarily textualises whatever it reads that nothing can present itself within the psyche without doing so on the textual register” (96). In other words, the discourse that informs the media is very similar to the discourse that informs all textuality.

In a similar vein, Kristeva argues that “if there exists a ‘discourse’ which is not a mere deposition of thin linguistic layers, an archive of structures, or the testimony of a withdrawn body, and is, instead, the essential element of a practice involving the sum of unconscious, subjective, and social relations in gestures of confrontation and appropriation, destruction and construction—productive violence, in short—it is ‘literature’, or, more specifically, the text” (Kristeva, 1984: 16). A discourse is more, therefore, than a set of textual layers such as might be perceived behind an instance of text or a historical collection of texts that came before texts or even the “testimony” of a hidden body of texts. As Kristeva indicates, it is the sum total of unconscious social relations that are manifested through individual texts. Discourse is therefore the ultimate text from which all texts spring. The discourse of the media therefore, is a combination of the social, political, economic, cultural, and above all, textual elements from which media texts are produced.

Another very useful theorist to turn to in a discussion of discourse is Barthes, who reminds us that “... one must always define the position from which one speaks; or silence discourse and oneself...” (Barthes, 1985:109). Media texts are generally very clear about representing the position from which they speak as one of objectivity, but this claim very rarely holds water in any closer examination of media texts. Nevertheless, Barthes also explains discourse as an understanding that there is no place without language:

“...one cannot contract language, what is verbal (and even verbose), with some pure and dignified space which would be the space of reality and truth, a space outside language. Everything is language, or more precisely, language is everywhere. It permeates the whole of reality; there is nothing real without language. Any attitude that consists in

hiding from language behind a nonlanguage or a supposedly neutral or insignificant language is an attitude of bad faith. The only possible subversion in language is to displace things. ... We cannot move into nondiscourse because it doesn't exist" (1985:162).

Discourse, therefore, is also a place of aware subjectivity, the understanding that the process of re-presenting reality in texts is necessarily subjective and that language is the substance that underpins all expression.

Furthermore, Barthes says that "literature has been historically defined by a certain type of society. When society changes, inescapably, either in a revolutionary or a capitalistic direction (because the death of cultural objects does not determine the direction of political change), then so does literature (in the institutional, ideological, and aesthetic sense that this word had not long ago): it can either disappear completely (a society without literature is perfectly conceivable) or so change its conditions of production, consumption and writing, in short, its value, that it will have to change its name as well" (192). This comment is even more interesting if one considers it within the context of media's literary takeover in contemporary society. It is indeed possible that the text may have metamorphosed into a megatext, media, as a result of some of the inescapable political and technological changes that society has experienced. Media has certainly demonstrated massive changes in the conditions of production and consumption, in short, it has, as Barthes summarises, changed its *value* and thereby changed the value of the idea of the text at the same time.

A discourse therefore, is the context of any instance of communication, or text; it is the fabric from which texts are created. Discourse is closely related to the authorial context as well as to the prevailing socio-economic and political environment. In the case of media, the socio-economic environment that informs it is very much an environment of post-modern industrialism, technological revolution and capitalism, with lashings of social consciousness thrown in to temper the mix. Capitalism is undoubtedly a primary motivator in the production of media as product. Politically, as has also been reviewed in

Chapter 1, the media are collectively considered a pillar of democracy; the freedom of the media and the role of the media as society's watchdog is closely linked to such constitutional principles such as the freedom of expression and access to information.

It is not surprising therefore that the discourse that informs media is one that is deeply rooted in western democratic culture, nor that all media personnel work within a framework that is defined as "media ethics" or "media values". Broadly, this discourse holds the media to remain true to principles such as objectivity and fair reporting (where no party is favoured over the other in the reporting of information), non-offensive attitudes (particularly with regards to any representation that could be considered discriminatory, sexist or racist) and reliable research and representation of the facts. The latter is perhaps the most important aspect of media ethics – it is a grave and serious offence for any media to publish unsubstantiated reports or accounts, which could expose it as biased or blatantly in the service of a political interest. Of course, a code of rules would be useless if the rules weren't broken and in practice, examples of violations of this code are common and numerous, exposing the lip-service nature of the discourse, but as long as the media does not seriously challenge the political and economic powers that be (as we will find out in Chapter 5), most violations are tolerated, or dealt with by boards appointed to monitor and regulate the media, as well as through peer-regulation. If one instance of media acts in a politically incorrect manner, another competing instance of media will not hesitate to show them up for their infraction, thereby establishing a moral high ground for itself in the guise of serving the public, democratic interest. An example is how the Sunday Times attacked the City Press for its publishing of allegations that Bulelani Ngcuka was an apartheid spy. Media peer regulation is often a thinly disguised veil of self glorification, but at least it allows some sort of system of checks and balances to keep rogue reporters and editors in line.

Media discourse is also well represented in the stylistic commonalities of all instances of media. Various types of articles and reports are structured according to specific stylistic formulas, which have been established in much the same way as legal precedent. News stories are written in the manner that they have always been written (most recent facts first, Who, Where, When, What, How, wrapping up with a reference to any related old news). Magazine articles are written in a easy-to-read unchallenging conversational tone that aims to encourage readers to identify with the person or situation described. Categories of media also generally follow a similar formula, with information, as well as tone, pretty much interchangeable from media instance to media instance within categories – all fashion magazines say much the same thing in much the same way; all tabloid newspapers tend to rely on sensational headlines; all television news programmes rely on an authoritative-sounding, moderately attractive and well spoken anchors to read the news.

Visually, stylistic formulas are also *de rigueur* in the choice and placement of photographs or images. In fact, the pervasiveness of the image in media is almost entire; such that it has generated an entirely new study of visual literacy, one that is too broad to include in this discussion. In the news media, only very striking, emotional or indeed shocking pictures are used in order to draw the readers' attention and attract sales; the general rule being that "shock value sells". The more interesting, grotesque or outrageous an image, the more likely it is to be used (hence The Citizen's choice of an image of a grotesquely injured horse to illustrate the carnage of a suicide bomb blast in Baghdad). In fact, to be first with outrageous or controversial pictures is often a news media's proudest claim to fame – consider the number of newspaper pole-boards that proclaim something in the order of "Minister Sex Scandal – Pictures", or "Bok Camp Horror – Pictures".

In entertainment media, the general rule is that sex sells. Front cover images have to be sexually aspirational, be it a women's magazine that encourages perfect skin, firm breasts and satisfying sex every time, or a men's magazine

that idealises hard abs, sexual prowess and a perfect smile. The bottom line is that if the model or celebrity on the cover of the magazine is sufficiently sexually attractive, the magazine will sell. Another formula common to the magazine cover is the use of numbers in straplines: “33 ways to get him back”, “SA’s 50 most eligible bachelors”, “Orgasms in 5 minutes flat” and “2 weeks to a flat tummy” are the types of phrases liberally applied all over the glossy exterior of magazines in order to encourage sales.

The objective and regulated nature of the media is another key defining characteristic of media discourse. In South Africa, since 1994 and the advent of a free and democratic society and media, media freedom is regulated by the overarching constitution as well as a variety of specific information and media laws. These include the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa Act (13 of 2000), which established ICASA as a sector-specific regulation for the broadcasting and telecommunications sectors; the Independent Broadcasting Authority Act (153 of 1993) and the Broadcasting Act (4 of 1999), both of which regulate broadcasting; the Media Development and Diversity Act (14 of 2002), which aims to promote media development and diversity, and the Promotion of Access to Information Act, which regulates access to information held by the state and private bodies (KAS, 2003: 73). As well as these laws governing media activity, three codes (one statutory and two voluntary) provide ethical and practical guidelines to media activity. They are the statutory BMCC Code, the voluntary BCCSA Code and the Press Code. The two former codes apply to the broadcasting sector, the latter to the print media sector. All the codes aim to lay down standards of conduct for the media in South Africa (KAS, 2003: 95). It is also important to set down that “the transition to democracy in South Africa was accompanied by considerable liberalisation of the mass media sector” (KAS, 2003: 61). Compared to many other developing countries, South Africa in general has a free and fair media sector, which is characterised by a number of independently owned (meaning not government owned) newspaper and broadcasters (KAS, 2003: 61-2).

In the discussion of discourse, another important language element to consider is tone – that subtle aspect of a text that is often independent of what is being said explicitly and something that is much easier to identify in spoken than written language. The discourse of media is also defined by a shared and common tone that pervades all categories and instances of media.

Media tone is defined by the manner in which the information is delivered, namely in a seemingly objective and unaffected manner. In most reports and articles, barring, of course opinion pieces, facts and opinions are offered in a manner that suggests complete un-involvement and objectivity, even when, ironically, the story is about itself (which often happens when journalists win awards or a new editor is appointed). Furthermore, media inevitably suggest through their tone that what they are doing is in the public interest. Of course, the reality is not that instances of media are entirely independent: each is owned by a media owner with very specific financial and corporate interests at heart (the most pressing being sales, growing their readership and financial sustainability and profit) and related political interests (the preservation of a capitalist system that prioritises such interests) – as was evident even in 1936 when Virginia Woolf pointed out that “each paper is financed by a board; each board has a policy; each board employs writers to expound that policy, and if the writers do not agree with that policy ... they find themselves unemployed in the street” (Woolf, 1986:110). It is also crucial to understand that media are not objective observers of all that happens in the world. Media is a fiercely contested arena upon which political and financial ideologies are played out. As John Pilger cautioned in an SAFM interview on Sunday January 25, 2004, journalists need to understand that impartiality is a myth and there are agendas at play in every instance of reporting and publishing.

In many ways, therefore, media is a discourse that represents the imperatives of capitalist economy and society – and these imperatives, along with self-regulating and self-defining media ethics, unite all instances and categories of

media, no matter how diverse the respective media texts may appear at first glance.

At this point, it may be interesting to consider media discourse in the light of the ideas of Marshall McLuhan, with regards to hot and cold media, alongside those of Umberto Eco, with regards to open and closed texts. Applying these concepts to media discourse will provide further insight into media as a discourse, an argument predicated on the preceding suggestions of media as a megatext.

McLuhan defines media by grouping them according to the categories “hot” and “cold”. A hot medium is “one that extends one single sense in high definition, which is the state of being well filled in data. Hot media are low in participation and leave less to be filled in by the audience” (McLuhan, 1994:22). A cold medium, on the other hand, “lacks articulation of data” (29) and includes the audience, needing their participation in order to be meaningful. It would not be viable to discuss whether media texts themselves can be considered hot or cold, as the answer will differ according to the discrete media text that is approached, depending on many factors, including its subject category, genre, frequency and audience. What is however interesting, and may reveal another facet of the discussion of media discourse, is an assessment of whether the *discourse* of media is hot or cold – more interesting considering the submission that media discourse is essentially what unites the mega-text.

The first question that may be pertinent here is: “Does media discourse encourage or discourage audience participation?” On one level the answer is of course yes, as without the audience, the media loses its *raison d’être*, the very purpose of its existence is to communicate with the public and to be read or consumed and commented upon. Considering that the purpose of participation is the construction of meaning, however, perhaps the answer should be less hasty. In particular instances of media, and through carefully

constructed feedback forums, media can appear to encourage interactivity with its audience. I will discuss the reader further shortly and argue there that media constructs its audiences very carefully as “the market”, but for now it may be enough to suggest that through its discourse media leaves very little space for the reader to interpret and thereby create meaning. The “objective” tone of most articles, reports and stories leaves very little to debate, suggesting that all that can possibly be known about a particular situation has been presented and that a reader’s role is merely to consume or absorb it. Practically, of course this is not what happens, which is why most media texts are themselves cold, but on a discourse level, media is hot, presenting itself as filled with data and meaning to the absolute maximum.

Umberto Eco’s seminal work on open and closed texts is another interesting theoretical place within which the discourse of media can be considered. An open work, argues Eco, is one that envisages the role of the reader at the moment of its generation and that reduces interpretive indeterminacy. An open text is one that is so well organised that it “presupposes a model of competence coming from outside the text as well as working to build up, by textual means, such a competence” (Eco, 1979:7-8). A closed text on the other hand “obsessively aims at arousing a precise response from readers” but are ironically, “open to any possible aberrant decoding”. Closed texts pull a reader upon a predetermined path, carefully displaying effects in order to arouse specific emotions at specific moments (8).

Open and closed texts are therefore closely linked to authorial intention. Considering media discourse in the context of these definitions, it may be tempting to label it open, as it is often very difficult for a reader to interpret the media indeterminately. How could one fail to understand the meaning, both localised and socio-politically extended, of a newspaper article about child rape, for example? In this context it is important to remember that I am interested in analysing whether the discourse of media is open or closed, not instances of media text themselves, which may be open or closed depending

on the skill and intentions of the authors. Considering the discourse of media, that unifying tone and style of media, it becomes clear that media discourse is closed in that it definitely intends to pull the reader along a predetermined path and to elicit specific emotions from the reader at each step of the way. In newspaper articles, the “where what when how” formula pre-empts reader questions (How did he/she die? Where did they find the body? Who did it? What did the victim’s mother say?) with answers. For example, see Appendix 5, which shows the newspaper report about the tragic death of a toddler. The story answers the reader’s automatic questions such as, how did the child die? Where was his mother? Who was looking after him? In magazine articles, the narrative is constructed in order to elicit a feeling of identification from the reader (“Many young women between 24 and 30 are concerned about how to balance desires for career success and desires for a family”) and helpfully provides lifestyle tips so that the readers don’t have to think too hard for themselves. (See Appendix 6 for an example of such an article.) Whether or not the reader complies is entirely irrelevant to the description of closed texts, in fact, Eco considers it a further factor of the closed text that it can give rise to unforeseeable interpretations, including parody and ridicule. For an example of such a parody, see Appendix 10, which I will discuss further in the sub-section “The Model Reader” in Chapter 5. An open text on the other hand, rarely gives rise to unforeseeable interpretations – it is read and understood largely as the author intended it to be, or it is not understood at all.

Some examples of the inter-textuality of discourse throw further light on the manner in which similar stylistics and authorial intentions link disparate media texts. Consider Appendix 7, *Synchronous Magazine Covers*, where two different women’s fashion magazines put out issues in the same month with almost identical covers. The magazines, *Cosmopolitan* and *Elle* are both South African versions of international titles but are owned by two different media owners, Associated Magazines and Johnnic Publishing respectively. Both covers feature a black model on a green background. It is becoming

more common for such traditionally white middle class women's magazines to become more "afrocentric" (afros are back in fashion, after all) but choosing a black model for the cover remains a minority event in the world of fashion magazine covers. Furthermore, green has always been a colour that has been shied away from fashionably, until 2004 that is, when green became the "new black" and black faces became less daring. While it is certainly true that the covers of most women's magazines generally follow the same formula (beautiful airbrushed model or celebrity in expensive and skimpy clothing) the synchronous release of two almost conceptually identical covers from two competing fashion women's magazines demonstrates just how pervasive the discourse informing the media is. It also reveals the myth within which fashion magazines operate – the myth of constantly providing something new. It is pretty clear that neither magazine was providing something new, although they both continued to pretend that they were and that their opposition, doing exactly what they were doing, did not exist. Consider also the covers of *Marie Claire* and *Cosmopolitan* in the following month (also shown in Appendix 7). Although the discourse of the fashion magazine has reverted to safe and pretty (white) celebrities on the cover, the statement that "yellow is in" and "long hair is sexy" are as inescapable as the message that black can be beautiful and that green is no longer a risky cover from the first set of synchronous covers.

Of course, in the case of newspapers it is normal for them to run similar front pages, especially in the case of major breaking news (such as the shark attack scenario presented in Appendix 2, where all the regional papers in the Western Cape placed massive photographs of sharks on their front pages).

The redundant inter-textuality of the media is therefore as a direct result of the shared discourse that informs all media texts. This inter-textuality takes a variety of forms and is apparent in both the structures and content of the media artefacts; both their mediums and their messages.

At this point is necessary to move on to a discussion of the final level of analysis of the argument for the megatext: supra-textual links that unite all instances of media.

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"The figure of the author has become plural and moves always in a group, because nobody can be delegated to represent anybody."
Italo Calvino, *If on a winter's night a traveller* (96)

Chapter 5

Knitting the Megatext: Supra-(con)textuality

The idea of supra-textuality is linked to the political and economic context within which media texts are produced and consumed. This section of the thesis will examine in more detail the ideas of production (authorship) and consumption (readership) in the context of the media as megatext, with the intention of demonstrating how the pervasive and far-reaching structures of media ownership and the fantasy of audience knit the megatext even more tightly than inter-textuality and the other unifying factors discussed to this point.

At this point it is necessary to agree on an understanding of the term "post-modern", a term that is likely to crop up often in a discussion of production and consumption. Ben Agger is very useful in this respect. He argues that in the media and much contemporary discourse and debate, post-modern has come to be characterised by "a supposed post-industrialism, the end of class conflict, a consumer cornucopia of limitless goods and services, high technology and the end of ideology and global modernisation. It suggests a centrelessness to world history and the moral and political principles of a new individualism as well as the eclecticism of personal, cultural and political styles" (Agger, 1990:5). In many senses this is true of media texts, which conflate high and low art (consider the high brow intellectual book reviews of the Sunday Times Lifestyle supplement in the context of the apparently indispensable back page girly picture) and the often carnivalesque nature of tabloid-like news stories and reports from around the world. Media in South Africa is also particularly careful to try and cater to the "Rainbow Nation", with a wealth of diversity and interest generally represented across newspaper and magazine pages. In this shallow, cosmopolitan definition of post-modernism, then, the media is indeed post-modern. But it is also post-modern in an

entirely more profound way; one that I shall argue is a defining characteristic of the media as megatext.

Agger's central argument in *The Decline of Discourse* is that post-modernism is a *continuation* of, not a *rejection* of late industrial capitalism – or modernism, which is characterised by elite ownership of private property, sexism and racism (Agger, 1990:6). Agger argues that late capitalism should be retheorised within the paradigms of Marxism and feminism in order to achieve a powerful liberatory element that is currently veiled within a pretended cosmopolitanism that is really parochial (6).

In Agger's conception of true post-modernism, then, the media is not post-modern, but deceptively modern. While it does dispense a surface cosmopolitanism (the magazine of the same name is the ultimate example of this), the media (with the exceptions of a few instances of media) is essentially entirely unthreatening to the capitalistic social order. It is in fact one of the busiest elements working to misrepresent the mechanisms ensuring that wealth and power remain in the hands of the few. Media is indeed one of the most powerful elements in a social system that works to "move products, not minds" (7) and is a very large segment of a "culture industry" that eschews cultural conformity (15).

To distinguish between false post-modernism, which Agger precedes with the adjective "cosmopolitan" and authentic post-modernism, which Agger precedes with the adjective "critical" and describes as "a radical theory of society" (3), a theoretical perspective that is indeed threatening to the dominant social order and that recognises that the personal is the political (as opposed to the former that rejects politics and believes in a new individualism in which one owes nothing to society) and that resists the commodifying forces of popular culture, from this point on I will refer to the former in quotation marks ("post-modernism"), and the latter without (post-modernism).

Megamedia

The first element of this discussion concerns patterns of media ownership, one of the most dominant factors in media authorship. In his 1998 book of the same name, Dean Alger terms the massive corporate organisations that dominate media production “megamedia”. He explains:

The mass media can facilitate thoughts and discussion or they can stifle it. They can advance the progress of civilisation or they can thwart it. They can debase and vulgarise mankind.... They can play up or down the news and its significance, foster and feed emotions, create complacent fictions and blind spots.... Their scope and power are increasing every day as new instruments become available to them. ... Clearly then, who owns and controls these powerful means of mass communications and how the media are used to convey – or to distort or fail to convey – information and images is of critical importance to society in general and the democratic process in specific... (1998:5).

The fact that media are corporate entities active within a post-modern frame of operation is crucial and should not be ignored. Every major media entity (aside from prestige media which are marketing exercises and some independent passion media such as personal websites, etc) operates as a business – its expenditure is measured against its income, and unless the former equals or exceeds the latter in the long run, the media business will fail and cease to exist. Media is not only business, it is *big* business; it is an industry that produces listed national and multinational companies and which is as important to the national and global capitalist economy as manufacturing, mining, agriculture and trade. A far cry from the much vaunted idealistic aims of providing access to information and championing the democratic ideals of freedom of expression, et cetera, championed by the smaller fish involved in media, the bottom line to all media enterprises is just that: the bottom line.

As Tawana Kupe argues in an article available at www.themedias.co.za (01/09/03): “When talking about the public interest, media ownership matters because it has implications for editorial control. As content should ideally

empower audiences to become informed citizens, editorial and programming independence is essential". With reference to a paper by Kupe, a Marketing Web journalist, Felicity Duncan, reported that "the media today are big business. Companies like Johnnic, Naspers and Caxton are listed on the JSE [the Johannesburg Stock Exchange], are major employers and answer to their shareholders. Because they are big business, their major drive is profitability. However the major role of the media in a democracy is to act as watchdog, argues Kupe, and he asks how media can "perform their roles to inform, analyse and be a watchdog over all powerful institutions and individuals' impartiality' when they are businesses first" (Duncan: 09/03/04).⁸

In South Africa, patterns of media ownership are telling. In an unpublished 2003 paper by Les Tilley, a Wits Honours Student in Journalism, the author analyses the ownership patterns of South Africa's newspaper market. Tilley found that newspaper ownership patterns in South Africa followed international trends, where "mass media industries operate along non-competitive oligopolistic lines, because concentrated media markets tend to be vastly less risky and more profitable for the firms that dominate them". Internationally, world media is dominated by ten large multinational corporations, and while the United States has over 1600 newspapers, there are only fourteen dominant newspaper publishing companies, says Tilley. The pattern in South Africa is similar: out of the 42 newspaper titles in South Africa, Independent Newspapers owns 33.2%, whilst Naspers owns 32.1% – making a whopping 65% of newspaper ownership shared between only two corporate entities, with Johncom coming in third with a 13.1% ownership. Furthermore, Tilley estimates that together Independent and Naspers attract 74% of advertising spend and 65% of circulation. These figures clearly demonstrate that the South African media market is dominated by two major corporate players.⁹

⁸ In her article Duncan refers to a paper presented by Prof Tawana Kupe at the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research on 08 February 2004.

⁹ Please note that all of the figures provided by Tilley are based on ABC (Audit Bureau of Circulation) from Jul-Dec 2002. Although updated figures are available, they tell pretty much the same story: that a year and a half later, the same patterns of media ownership are apparent.

A newspaper article (“Naspers on a Media Roll”, G. Du Venage, 26/03/04), ironically in South Africa’s most recent, and now defunct, independent daily newspaper, owned neither by Naspers or Independent, *This Day*¹⁰, described Naspers’ domination of the local media sector. In the first place, Naspers has a 98% domination of the Afrikaans newspaper publishing market, “effectively dominating Afrikaans public opinion,” according to media analyst Max du Preez, who worries that “there is always a risk when one company dominates the news that you do not get the full story”. Naspers has also achieved significant footholds in other media sectors, illustrating the fact that media owners typically have interests in a variety of media enterprises: Naspers owns a stake in a company called MNH98, which owns M-Net and Supersport, as well as stakes in Media24, one of South Africa’s premium online news agencies, and DSTV, South Africa’s satellite television company, as well as 50% of Associated Magazines, publishers of women’s titles including *Cosmopolitan* and *Femina*. As well as all of these shareholding interests, Naspers has its own stable of magazines, including *You*, *Drum* and *Huisgenoot*, *Fair Lady* and *Sarie* as well as English and Afrikaans newspapers (the *Daily Sun*, the *Sunday Sun*, the *City Press*, *Rapport*, *Beeld* and *Die Burger*) (Du Venage: 2004). Naspers also owns a stake in Touchline Media¹¹, publishers of a stable of titles including *Men’s Health* and *Shape* as well as a 50% stake in the *Natal Witness*, one of the last remaining independent newspapers in South Africa (Du Venage: 2004).

As can be expected, the rest of the media industry is getting a little nervous about the monopolistic tendencies of Naspers – but more out of a fear of unfair competition that could lead to loss of advertising revenue than of concern about the implications for a vibrant, healthy and diverse media sector. In fact, as reported in the article cited above Caxton entered a (failed) complaint to the Competition Tribunal, claiming that Naspers could use its

¹⁰ By the end of 2004 *This Day* has folded, apparently due to financial mismanagement and lack of capital backing, although many media consumers and commentators agreed that the editorial content of the newspaper was excellent. One wonders whether any other articles pointing out the monopoly of media ownership will be forthcoming in any of the titles owned by Independent or Naspers.

¹¹ see www.naspers.com for more about this multinational company’s structure and www.media24.co.za for more about is dominance of print media in South Africa

stake in pay television to influence print advertising. Caxton was concerned that Naspers might be able to offer unfair packages across pay TV and print to advertisers, which other media owners would never be able to compete with. Clearly, media is *big* business, but it is equally crucial to consider what the impact of such media ownership patterns are on the encoding or authoring of media.

In the post-modern capitalist system, there is nothing that denotes power quite so much as capital itself. Capital refers to more than simply obscene amounts of money (recall the discussion of the million at the beginning of this thesis), it also refers to ownership of the means of production – and in the context of media this refers to the ownership of the resources to produce media. In many aspects, the role of that juristic personality, the media owner, is even more pervasive than the reporters and editors that make up the cast of authors that I will discuss later.

In a January 2002 article published in *The Nation* (see www.thenation.com), Mark Crispin Miller rails against what he terms America's media cartel, which "represents the grand convergence of the previously disparate US culture industries – many of them vertically monopolised already – into one global superindustry providing most of (America's) imaginary 'content'" ("What's Wrong With This Picture?" 07/01/02). Miller is referring to the handful of massive culture/media corporations, including AOL Time Warner, Viacom, News Corporation, Disney, AT&T and Vivendi, which together co-direct all of America's media, thereby bringing about enormous qualitative changes. Miller explains (and this is worth quoting at some length):

For one thing, the cartel's rise has made extremely rare the sort of marvellous exception that has always popped up, unexpectedly, to startle and revivify culture – the genuine independents among record labels, radio stations, movie theatres, newspapers, book publishers and so on. Those that don't fail nowadays are so remarkable that they inspire not emulation but amazement. Otherwise, the monoculture, endlessly and noisily triumphant, offers, by and large, a lot of nothing, whether packaged as 'the news' or 'entertainment'. Of all the cartel's dangerous consequences for

American society and culture, the worst is its corrosive influence on journalism. Under AOL Time Warner, GE, Viacom, et al, the news is, with a few exceptions, yet another version of the entertainment that the cartel also vends non-stop.

Of course, one of the first things that a large media corporation will do, given access to the unchallenged control over grand scale, sophisticated public address systems (which is in many ways how the media functions), is self promote. As Miller illustrates, Viacom, which owns among others CBS, a television show production company, a massive percentage of cable channels (including UPN, MTV, MTV2, VH1, Nickelodeon, the Movie Channel, the list goes on), a radio broadcasting company with 184 stations, Paramount Pictures (a movie production titan) and several book publishers (including Simon & Schuster and, ironically, Free Press), obliged CBS News to devote “epic stretches” of its *Early Show* to what happened on *Survivor*. Is that really news? Viacom certainly thought so. Such self promotion is not uncommon in South Africa either – consider how M-Net’s respected and award-winning investigative journalism show *Carte Blanche* descended into what some might consider the sordid depths of reality television, becoming obliged to interview the latest evictees from *Big Brother*, as though consumers hadn’t received enough of their crude antics and ill-formed opinions whilst lounging around the house twenty-four hours a day, or how e.TV News often closes up its bulletin with a friendly reminder that viewers can catch a UEFA soccer match or feature movie “up next”.

All of this clearly demonstrates that the weighty hand of the media owner is very, very powerful in the authoring of media, some might even argue, the most powerful. The influence of the media owner on the media texts that it owns are far reaching. Not only do they shape the content in a direct way – such as using their news broadcasters to prioritise self-serving “news” interests, the media cartel’s broader political and economic interests also dictate general media ethics. Massive corporations have very particular political and economic interests at heart, and as several centuries of western

capitalism have demonstrated, those interests are generally self-serving. In the context of a media corporate giant, those interests are to serve their advertisers and therefore their own revenue streams – as Miller continues,

Take the 'public interest' – an ideal that really isn't hard to understand. A media system that enlightens us, that tells us everything that we need to know pertaining to our lives and liberty and happiness, would be a system dedicated to the public interest. Such a system would not be controlled by a cartel of giant corporations, because those entities are ultimately hostile to the needs of the people. Whereas we need to know the truth about such corporations, they often have an interest in suppressing it (as do their advertisers). And while it takes time and money to find out the truth, the parent companies tend to cut the necessary costs of journalism, much preferring the sort of lurid fare that can drive endless hours of agitated jabbering. (Prior to 9/11 it was Monica, then *Survivor*, then Chandra Levy, whereas since that fatal day we've had mostly anthrax plus much heroic footage from the Pentagon). The cartel's favoured audience, moreover, is that stratum of the population most desirable to advertisers – which has meant the media's complete abandonment of working people and the poor.

While this American opinion on an American situation cannot necessarily be neatly transplanted onto South Africa, its points are nevertheless valid. As Max du Preez voices in the *This Day* article cited above, what happens when big corporations control the news? Equally concerning, what happens when the same big corporation controls the culture, movie making, radio and television broadcasting and book publishing industry? Miller might argue that it makes the media indifferent to the public interest – something that is deeply damaging to the fabric of a free and democratic society. This is certainly another massive issue that requires research, one that this paper lacks the scope to tackle. My concern in response to this semi-hypothetical situation is to return to the central tenet of this thesis by asking another question, what effect do such media ownership patterns ("megamedia", as it was termed by Dean Alger) have on the process of authorship and what are the resulting effects on the text, and reading patterns?

If the process of creating a text as an author is encoding, and if that process is inspired by some type of authorial intention, then both the intention of the media author(s) and the process by which the author(s) encode(s) are relevant here.

A traditional literary theorist analysing a novel, for example, might ask questions about the discourse and socio-political situation from which the author writes, or within which the author places the novel, or explore any psychological or personality traits that may have some bearing on the themes and issues translated into literature. In a similar way therefore, it is crucial to note that the post-modern, globalised (referring here to the frontier-less world that the flow of capital enjoys), elite (in that it remains in the hands of the privileged global minority) socio-economic context in which media big business operates has a telling and pervasive influence on the content, form and priority of all media. Furthermore, the “profit over people” mentality remains the primary motivation behind the activities of media owners – far from acting only in the public interest; they primarily act in the private commercial interest, using public interest either as a convenient justification or a social responsibility. These facts are a crucial element in any analysis of the role of media owners in the authorship of media as text.

Consider the fact of media ownership within my contention that media make up a megatext. When I was originally seeking a supervisor to guide me in the writing of this thesis, I approached one Media Studies academic, who, upon hearing my ideas that media could be analysed and described as a single text, much like the novel, asked me whether I *really* thought that there could be any relation between a programme on a DSTV channel and an article in an Afrikaans newspaper, for example, that justified suggesting that they were part of one massive text. Considering that, in all likelihood, one of the most powerful actors in the cast of authors of both instances of media are the same corporate personality (Naspers), it is certainly likely that there are deep and broad underlying authorial intentions that led to the manifestation of both

texts, that motivated and influenced their content and form. Indeed, each text differs in its subject matter, its format, its genre, its language even, but it is united by the pattern and intention of its authoring. If it is possible that mega-authors exist, and they do, then it must be plausible that megatexts do too.

A Cast of Authors

In literary theory, the concept central to authoring is power – the power to convert language into an art, the power to convert concepts into written language with which an audience is capable of engaging. Stuart Hall terms this “encoding”; “the transposition into (and out of) the message form is not a random movement that can be ignored” (Hall, 1994:201). Hall explains that producers of a message or text construct it through a variety of factors, including meaning and ideas, historically defined technical skills, ideologies, knowledge and (to me most crucially, and something that I will explore in more depth later) *assumptions about the audience* (201 – italics mine). Frameworks of knowledge, such as the relations of production and the producer’s technical infrastructure, encode meaning structures (203).

Within this framework, therefore, the producers of media literature encode it through control over technical skills and technological infrastructure, subscription to a particular set of ideologies and a researched understanding of what they believe their audience wants. Without a doubt, both media production and consumption are certainly the results of access to technology. The development of the printing press heralded a rapid and immense development of technology that has allowed ever newer media to be developed, dispersed and utilised. More current technological developments, most notably the invention of the radio¹² and the television¹³ (two now familiar devices of mass communication) and of course the explosion in access to

¹² The first radio signals were sent and received by Guglielmo Marconi in Italy in 1895. See <http://inventors.about.com/library/inventors/blradio.htm>

¹³ The television was not invented by a single inventor, although the term was first used in 1900 by Constantin Pyerski, a Russian scientist, at the 1st International Congress of Electricity. The first long distance transmission of TV images took place between Washington DC and New York City in 1927. By 1936, about 200 television sets were in use worldwide. By 1996 there were a billion. See http://inventors.about.com/library/inventors/bl_television_timeline.htm

personal computers¹⁴ in the last two decades, have made access to, and therefore the demand for, media a matter of constant exponential growth. This broad access to basic technology does not necessarily affect the fairly exclusive control over production technology, which by and large remains in the hands of the large media corporates who own various publications and broadcasters. Specific technical skill is also required in the production of media, be it in the filming or editing of visual footage for a news bulletin, or the layout and design of an article and images for a print publication. Finally, as discussed in the previous section dealing with media discourse, the producers of media generally share an ideology – which can be summed up in broad terms as an adherence to the belief in their ability to be objective, the importance of media freedom, a shared conception of what is newsworthy and a belief that in general, the industry is serving the public by providing channels for information.

Unlike traditional literary categories, the media does not have a single recognisable author or encoder who creates the shape and form of the final text. Although there are indeed certain individuals largely responsible for managing and producing the content of an instance of media, such as an editor or producer, I will argue that it is rather a “cast of authors” that shapes the final media-product that is consumed by the public.

Aside from the figure-head of each instance of media (the editor or director), a large team contributes to the encoding of the final product consumed. Publishers or producers generally assume the role of managing the financial and time management processes of producing the instance of media, whilst editors or directors are responsible for the overall direction of content. In general, the latter control teams of writers and reporters, who are each responsible for smaller sections of content. In publications, photo editors are generally responsible for sourcing and choosing images, be it from in-house

¹⁴ The first programmable computer was called Z1, and was invented by Konrad Zuse in 1936. the first computer game was invented in 1962 – the ‘Spacewar Computer Game’ invented by Steve Russell and MIT. In 1969, the ARPAnet, the original internet, was set up. The first consumer computers became available in the late 1970s. Microsoft’s ‘Graphic User Interface’ was launched in 1983. See http://inventors.about.com/library/blcoindex.htm?PM=ss12_inventors

photographers, in-house photo archives, freelance photographers, image banks or elsewhere. Editors also often call upon the services of freelance writers and illustrators. Teams of graphic designers are employed to create the “look” of the finished product, arranging the layout of the text and images (more often than not manipulating images too – less so in news media which would shudder at the suggestion that they publish doctored images, and more so in consumer / entertainment media, where it is par for the course for the cover model’s blemishes to be “Photoshopped” out of existence) and choosing colours and font styles to represent the article. Finally, sub-editors step in to proof the text, cut it down where necessary so that it fits into the space, write captions, pull out phrases from articles to be accentuated to draw the readers’ eyes in, and coin headlines and cover straplines.

All in all, it is certainly not one single individual responsible for the final look, shape and content of any piece of media that is offered to the public for decoding, but a complex hierarchy of authors, certainly under the control of media owners and figure-head leaders (editors) but a cast of authors nevertheless.

In a speech delivered to the American Society of Newspaper Editors in April 1996, later published in *Step Across This Line* (2003), Salman Rushdie suggests that newspaper editors and novelists have more in common than they might think. “The word novel derives from the Latin word for *new*; in French *nouvelles* are both stories and news reports,” says Rushdie. “A hundred years ago, people read novels, among other things, for information. From Dickens’ *Nicholas Nickleby*, British readers got shocking information about poor schools like Dotheby’s Hall, and such schools were subsequently abolished” (142). Rushdie goes on to argue that until the advent of the television age, literature shared with print journalism the task of telling people things they didn’t know but that now, however, people do not read newspapers for information but for a different take on news that they have already received from the internet, television and radio. “News has become a

matter of opinion. And this puts the newspaper editor in a position not at all dissimilar from that of a novelist. It is for the novelist to create, communicate and sustain over time a personal and coherent vision of the world that entertains, interests, stimulates, provokes and nourishes his readers. It is for the newspaper editor to do very much the same thing with the pages at his disposal. In that specialised sense – and let me emphasize that I mean this as a compliment! – we are all in the fiction business now,” states Rushdie (143).

Of course, what Rushdie did not acknowledge in his speech (perhaps because the large majority of his audience comprised the media figureheads I referred to above) is that it is certainly not only the job of one person in each media organisation to create that vision of the world that he refers to – it is a variety of input and effort that produces each newspaper’s (or television or radio show or websites for that matter) coherent vision of the world, a vision that is encoded in the black and white symbols of newsprint, the virtual ether of the internet and the reams of video and audio tape and digital recordings that make up the material of broadcast.

As well as this internal cast of authors, media products are also shaped and contributed to by external authorial role-players, significantly news agencies. These organisations, such as Reuters and Associated Press, make a living out of sourcing content and selling it to various instances of media rather than publishing it themselves. A significant percentage of all news stories are sourced from such newswires, indeed, every major publication and news channel uses such sources to some degree.

At this point it may be interesting to consider the so-called death of the author in the light of the media’s authorship. This concept suggests that writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. It is that neutral, composite, oblique space where the author-subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the identity of the body of writing. As soon as narration occurs, argues Roland Barthes in *The Death of the Author*, the voice

loses its origin, the author enters into his own death and writing begins (1994:166). This trend in literary analysis sought to escape the tyranny of the author, where ordinary literary interrogation centred on the man or woman who produced the text, and who was always perceived as the past of the text. "The removal of the author utterly transforms the modern text," explains Barthes, who goes on to argue that the author is born at exactly the same time as the text, and the text only at the time of reading. The death of the author implies that writing is a field without origin, whose only origin is language itself, language that ceaselessly calls into existence all origins. Ideas of the death of the author are tied up in ideas of inter-textuality, where "the total existence of writing: text, is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation" (170).

Such an absence of a single, over-shadowing author is characteristic of media texts, and in the way that they are consumed. Editors are interchangeable, the members of a broad and multi-layered cast of authors exercises discrete and particular powers of authorship over the final text produced and the reader is usually unaware of the web of authorship that has produced the text that he/she consumes. In many ways, the media is the ultimate example of the authorless text – it is possible to trace instances of media to so many varying sources, identify so many shades of input and influence, argue for the impact of such and such a meta-phenomena on the final shape of texts, but it is impossible to pin responsibility for authorship on any one actor. The cast of authors that I have described is then, in many ways, an absent author, a non-author.

As well as this diversity of author-actors, overarching political systems and actors are also influential in the final product that the consumer receives. The Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) commissioned research report in 2003 analysed the extent of comparative media freedom in Southern Africa by interviewing journalists about their political freedom of expression (a serious

concern in other SADC countries). While the report found that by and large South Africa protects the freedom of expression, it did pick up on “subtle yet dangerous in-roads being made into the freedom of expression” (KAS, 2003:62). For example, the SABC was cited as “not free from political or managerial interference” (KAS, 2003:63). Print journalists reported that, although more free to write about issues in the public interest than ever, they do experience definite pressures from management, government and even advertisers (KAS, 2003:65). Such pressure materialises in editors’ instructions to not write on certain issues (such as AIDS), difficulty in getting information from government departments, and experiences of being “frozen out” by government press cliques if their reports are considered unfavourable, all of which leads to a type of self-censorship as journalists typically do whatever they must to get a story published and get more by-lines under their belts. Journalists also noted that “it is not uncommon to see politicians frequenting the premises of print media houses,” in attempts to befriend journalists and editors (KAS, 2003:65). All of these observations highlight the interesting yet subtle effects on authorship from political pressures.

Of course, in some instances the author of a particular media text, such as a magazine or newspaper article, seems fairly obvious – the journalist cited, of course. But it is crucial to remember that these journalists may have drawn their information from a variety of sources (some accessible, some not), including those newswires and news agencies mentioned above, press releases, interviews with informants and even other journalists’ stories. Visual authors (press photographers and news camerapersons) also receive their due credits. Once these images and words are swallowed up by the media behemoth, they are edited, sub-edited, massaged, arranged and illustrated by a bevy of other actors. Who then is the Author? And, in the context of media as a genre of literature, does the birth of the reader indeed occur at the cost of the death of the author, as Barthes claims? (Culler, 1989:31).

Horizontal Influences on Authorship

As well as this extensive and shifting cast of authors and marked lack of Author, actors external to the employed ranks of the media are involved in the creation and production of media. One of the most crucial actors in this external cast of authors is the advertiser. Like news agencies, this actor exists and functions outside of the core staff authorial complement that creates the finished media product. The advertiser is, in general, a company or other juristic persona seeking to send positive messages about themselves, their products or their brand to the general public. The purpose of advertising is primarily to encourage a defined market (segment of the population) to purchase the advertisers' products or services. Inevitably, therefore, advertisements seek to create and bolster a positive image of the advertiser and its products.

McLuhan explains that "the trend in advertising is to manifest the product as an integral part of larger social purposes and processes" (1994:226). He argued that the aim of advertising is to move away from a consumer picture of a product towards a producer image of the process, which McLuhan saw as a "crude attempt to extend the principles of automation to every aspect of society" (227).

Advertising is an entire industry that is based on attempts to seduce the consumer, through the exploitation of human desires and emotions, into remaining true to one brand and that is based, as McLuhan noted, on "the tested foundations of public stereotypes or 'sets' of established attitudes". An advert, he continues, is a vigorous dramatization of the communal experience, and far more thought and care go into the production of an advert than an editorial (1994: 229). While adverts draw on specific perceptions of popular culture in their making, they are also, as Umberto Eco notes, essentially manifestations of popular culture in its many and varied forms, which repeat only what the listener already expected and already knew (Bondanella, 1997:72).

While on both a visual and textual level, adverts are telling and fascinating examples of the way in which language and art have evolved to reflect *and* exploit contemporary concerns and language patterns, my intention here is to describe the role that advertisers and advertising plays in the authoring of media.

While in some respects it is true that adverts are literary-visual texts that exist and can be analysed independently of their media context, it should not be forgotten that it is the underlying aim of every piece of advertising to encourage consumers to *buy*. Many adverts are artistic and visual statements about contemporary society. In fact, in *The Fall of Advertising and the Rise of PR*, Ries & Ries argue that advertising has become an art form and has lost its potential to actually move products off shelves: "People look at advertising the way they read a novel or watch a television show. They get involved in characters, situations, and plots without the least bit of motivation to act out any of the parts, including buying the product. It's all art" (2002:18). Adverts are of course statements that are predicated on a corporate desire to encourage consumerism (within a competitive environment of course, "consume *my* product, not *theirs!*") and brand loyalty and cannot be analysed outside of this authorial intention. Nightingale points out that advertising strategies fragment the audience, exaggerating differences in order to achieve sales (2003:368).

Advertising statements, carefully crafted by entire teams of market researchers, copywriters, graphic designers and creative directors underneath the watchful eye of the corporate client commissioning the adverts, are a massive component of any instance of media that exists. Consumer and news magazines have between 20% and 50% of their space occupied by adverts. Television and radio broadcasts sell between 6 and 12 minutes per hour to advertising spots. The internet is increasingly becoming the site of advertising – pop up ads, unsolicited e-mails (spam) and banner advertising are

unavoidable aspects of surfing the web, and more and more independent “news and views” websites are turning neat profits from selling banner, column and scroll-over adverts on their virtual territory¹⁵. In short, wherever an instance of media exists, advertising exists alongside it.

The relationship between editorial (that content produced and designed by the independent teams employed by media owners) and advertising is inextricably symbiotic. On the one hand, advertising revenue is the lifeblood of any media organisation – without income generated by the sale of space to advertisers, very few instances of media could exist, never mind turn a profit and be considered successful businesses. (This is a crucial point – most media operate as businesses, which means that they are driven by a profit motive and in the long run have to achieve income equal to or greater than their expenditure in order to carry on their business.) On the other hand, without the media, with their vast audiences of people looking for facts, information, entertainment and opinions in a variety of genres, these advertisers would struggle to disseminate their messages and sell their products. In theory, therefore, editorial and advertising are meant to be entirely unrelated, yet peacefully coexistent. Teams responsible for editorial generally consider advertising as a necessary evil, which allows them to continue to create or report unbiased and objective messages, and of course, pays their salaries. Advertisers, however are generally always on the lookout for editorial means by which they can make their adverts more effective, such as choosing where it is placed (advertisers of a new perfume endorsed by Jennifer Lopez will fight tooth and nail to have their double page spread placed directly after a personality profile of that celebrity; whereas a beer brand that is sponsoring a major football match will certainly ensure that in every advertisement break one of its adverts is scheduled -: in terms of this last point, see Appendix 8, where an advert for a perfume endorsed by R&B singer Beyonce Knowles is advertised in a magazine bearing her image on the cover). Media owners

¹⁵ I was recently interrupted in the middle of reading an online news story by an animated ad for an insurance company that enacted its scene (three cowboys, and a large pair of scissors cutting up the middle man) directly over the text that I was trying to read. It's no wonder that print newspapers will never die.

typically charge higher rates to advertisement spots that advertisers consider more effective, such as the spot next to the newspaper's front page title or the back cover of a magazine.

The relationship is hardly as innocent in practice as it is theoretically. In the first place, advertisers are well aware of their how needed the budgets at their disposal are – and will take every opportunity to leverage a media owner's desperation for the revenue to achieve as much editorial domination as possible. Should an advertiser get whiff of a story that it feels is damaging to its brand, it could threaten to pull its advertising unless the story is pulled. Often, media planners (those incumbents in advertising agencies responsible for deciding how to spend their client budget and in which media to buy advertising space) are well known to suggest that the publication is more likely to receive ad spend if they devote editorial space to the brand as well. An interesting addition to the advertiser's arsenal is the rise of the "advertorial", which is, essentially, space that is purchased for the exclusive use of the advertiser, but carefully designed to look exactly like editorial. Tellingly, media owners generally charge more for the sale of advertorial space. Editorial teams are also often involved in the copywriting and layout of these advertorials, which in many ways could be considered a compromise of much vaunted editorial independence. One media analyst commented on two experiences that he had with media owners, where he was offered "editorial space in exchange for cold hard cash" (Lankester, 2003). Outraged, he said that readers would have been none the wiser, assuming that "the publication they had bought had exercised due editorial judgement over the content, that the story and the angle had been mulled over by a wise editor... chewed around, discussed and finally the objective point of view written up, scrutinised and published with pride" (Lankester, 2003). Of course, its easy to blame only greedy advertisers, keen to cut through the clutter of marketing messages at all costs, but such blurred lines illustrate that more often than not it is the media owners who are equally greedy, allowing the bottom line to be more

important than those Utopian media values of editorial independence and news in the public interest.

As well as advertising, another field of marketing is becoming more and more influential in authoring media content. As public relations tightens its grip on the marketing industry, more and more media owners are refusing to even consider press releases or 'massaged' stories unless the client of the PR practitioner takes out advertising. Consider the following two examples from my own experience working in this field. A medium sized fashion retailer with stores across the country has always had a policy of not placing advertisements in fashion magazines, as the CEO considered them overpriced and ineffectual. Instead, this company achieved its brand and product exposure by offering its clothing to fashion editors and stylists for placement in the fashion shoots created by each magazine. Editorially, these publications are ethically bound to cite the source of each item of clothing featured in the shoot, as well as the stockists of such clothing. More than one publication was approached by competing fashion retailers, who are regular advertisers, complaining that not enough of their product was used in fashion shoots and unless the magazine started to use less of this non-advertising competitor's products, they would pull their advertising. One of the fashion magazines decided that the solution would be to refuse to cite the smaller fashion retailer correctly in the fashion shoots (whilst continuing to freely use their products) unless and until it places advertising.

Secondly, a restaurant in a shopping mall hired a PR consultancy to gain exposure for their new eatery. A wide variety of magazine and newspaper food reporters accepted invitations to visit and review the restaurant, save for one major regional newspaper, which refused to allow a reporter to review the restaurant unless it placed advertising. Only once the owners agreed to place an advert in the newspaper did a review take place (a review which was, without skipping a beat, entirely positive, recommending the restaurant to all readers). In many ways, such editorial insistence upon advertising

compromises the editorial integrity of the newspaper – had they furnished advertisers with a negative review (be it honest and fair or otherwise) they were at risk of losing current and potential advertisers, and in this way, it can be argued, censored themselves.

All of these descriptions have been necessary in order to illustrate the fact that media authorship is certainly not independent of, or immune to, corporate interests that generally have at their heart very particular and fairly selfish corporate goals. Media is both a pawn and a fully fledged actor in this exchange, and often uses its access to audiences to manipulate advertisers, whilst advertisers uses their access to hard cash to manipulate and control increasingly large chunks of content within the media. Without a doubt, the advertiser is a key actor in the cast of authors that shape the media that is often so innocently consumed by the wider public.

PR: Invisible Persuaders

The title of this section is taken from David Michie's 1998 book¹⁶ documenting the rise of the spin doctor in political, economic and entertainment media. In many aspects this book is a conspiracy theory account of the invisible yet highly influential hand of the corporate public relations (PR) practitioner, whose highly paid role is to influence the sway and bias of news reporting.

While it may be a sensationalised picture of the industry, there is no doubt that public relations has become a more and more powerful external role-player in the authoring of media. As media audiences become more and more saturated with advertising messages and become demonstrably brand-exhausted, many marketing executives are realising that achieving exposure through editorial mention is a much more effective manner of increasing awareness about their products and corporate identity amongst the public than straight and narrow advertising. This has led to a relative explosion in the

¹⁶ Who interestingly, is South African born, although *The Invisible Persuaders* focuses on British spin-doctors' manipulation of the media. The title of his book is of course based on Vance Packard's *The Hidden Persuaders*, that 'classic' expose of the American advertising industry.

PR industry – where PR nowadays means much more than organising parties and replying to customers' letters. PR has evolved into a sophisticated media liaison machine, where every day, thousands of PR consultants representing scores of clients each distribute “press releases” (ready made articles written from the perspective of the client) and suggest stories to journalists and editors. From one viewpoint, PR practitioners assist the media by alerting them to stories that they would not otherwise be aware of, thereby helping to create access to information and a more democratic media system. From another viewpoint, the ratio of PR consultants to actual full time independent journalists could be construed as somewhat worrying. Media owners typically hire as few journalists as possible, which generally translates to a fairly heavy reporting and writing load. With journalists expected to deliver a certain minimum of stories every day, it is more and more likely that they will cut and paste PR agency copy, instead of using it to research a balanced and objective report. (See Appendix 9 for an example of PR agency copy that has been used in a variety of different media texts. This example shows the original press release and how sections of it were reproduced word for word in various media article about the client.)

The extra clout that large corporates who can afford to hire a team of highly priced industrial journalists and PR consultants to act on their behalf to get positive media coverage has serious implications for media independence, freedom and the implications for democratic media coverage. Some deserving organisations (such as charities and NGOs) are unable to afford such services and therefore miss out on the opportunities to make their work and cause more widely known. Nevertheless, the most important issue that I would like to highlight here is that aside from the multilayered editorial and design teams that produce the media content and the advertisers that occupy large percentages of space and have the clout to influence editorial regularly, a third and relatively invisible sphere of influence is constantly at play in the “cast of authors”: the public relations industry.

Society as Audience

If we agree that media can be understood as a megatext produced in part by a mega-author controlling a vast cast of authors, it is clear that our attention should then turn to the reader, which I will argue is a fairly sizeable body (a mega-reader?): society at large. On one level, media texts are delivered to a largely anonymous reader – as all texts generally are. It is important to remember that it is virtually impossible to imagine the ultimate audience of any text, especially in the case of mass media. As Livingstone asks, “is the person sitting quietly on the sofa watching television part of a respectable audience, paying careful attention and concentrating on understanding and benefiting from the entertainment offered, or are they passive couch potatoes, dependent on media for their pleasures, uncritical in their acceptance of messages, vulnerable to influence?” (2003:349).

In general, media texts do not require a particularly strenuous level of effort from the audience in order to negotiate meaning, generally demanding nothing more than presence or half-hearted attention. (Indeed, the media is often considered nothing more than a diversionary text, receiving only a distracted flip-though, or the half tuned eyes and ears of the radio or TV listener/watcher unwinding after a day at work.) The interlinking of the visual and the textual, as well as the aural, means that instances of media rarely require full concentration on a body of writing longer than a few hundred words. Sometimes, even the reading of a headline is enough. Luhmann reminds us that “consumers make their presence felt at most in quantitative terms: through sales figures, through listener or viewer ratings, but not as a counteractive influence. The quantum of their presence can be described and interpreted, but it is not fed back via communication” (2000:75).

Media texts are constructed in order to be as widely accessible and as easily digestible as possible – in part to fulfil the mandate of acting in the public interest by providing a constant flow of information relevant to the larger community, and in part to garner as much audience as possible. Rushdie

suggests that “the speed of life is now so great that we can’t concentrate on anything for long. We need capsule meanings to be attached to news events instantly, explaining and pigeon-holing their significance, so that we can move on, secure in the illusion of having understood something” (Rushdie, 2003:347). He goes on to discuss the “News as Instant Metaphor” approach to consuming media, which he sees as a current obsession with finding symbolic meaning in headline-worthy events. “News as Instant Metaphor is excessively emotive, often politically slanted, inevitably shallow. It idealises and demonises its subjects, and dulls or inflames our responses” (349). Some might argue that the accessible language and format of the media are a result of the commodification of the discourse (marked by the creep of the promotional language used in advertising into editorial); whilst others may point out that they are the result of the democratisation or conversationalisation of that discourse (Bell & Garrett, 1998:12). It is certainly tenable that this accessibility is the result of media authorship, yet it also very much the result of reader demands. Society expects the media to be instantly consumable (much like everything else that we buy and consume in our excessively consumption-driven society), and media texts that do not cater to this need for information are likely to fail.

At this point it may be necessary to divert, briefly, into a discussion of the role of consumption in modern society. In a working paper presented at a research project, Frank Trentmann traced the history of research into consumerism and attempts to broaden the definition of consumerism beyond an acquisitive, individualist mentality that is focussed on the lure of material goods that are not clearly necessary for subsistence purposes, which are considered necessary in formulating life goals (Trentmann, 2002). Trentmann argues that “the tendency to reduce consumption to a materialist acquisition of goods by individuals makes it difficult to explore the multi-faceted workings of consumption in society and politics. Consumerism erodes identities and can disorient individuals ... even though it does not necessarily mean a complete surrender to ‘Western values’. Consumerism, measured in a rise in material

standards, ceases to add happiness in established consumer societies ... consumption in the late twentieth century has become as much about services, experiences, and citizenship as about the acquisition of goods” (Trentmann, 2002). Consumption, therefore, although clearly a contested domain, is a pervasive concept central to contemporary society. In this thesis, it will be taken for granted that media is a phenomenon that exists within a modern commercial context of consumerism. It will be argued that the media is both a source and result of such consumerism. The consumerist socio-economic context of the media will have implications for the description of it as a text and its author and readers. Furthermore, it should also be borne in mind that media texts are themselves products, which operate in a consumer paradigm in that they are produced in order to be sold. Barthes reiterates this by saying that “nowadays, in our societies, things have become quite complicated, because mass culture mixes up ideologies, superstructures. Mass culture offers for consumption, to classes without the economic means to consume them, products which are often consumed only as images” (1985:96). This is particularly the case with the media, the primary location where products are consumed only as images.

Both the commodification and the conversationalisation of culture are demonstrably applicable in the media. In a multi-lingual and heterogeneous society such as South Africa, with a history of social and economic inequity, it is indeed necessary to conversationalise and colloquialise media – otherwise large segments of the population would be excluded from accessing basic information. On the other hand, the pervasive influence of media owners and advertisers, as discussed above, have introduced what seems to be an irreversible commercialism into almost every media utterance. It seems that many South African media products are conversationalising commercialism rather than basic educative information – why, for example, is toothpaste commonly called “Colgate” in our townships?

One of the defining aspects of society's response to media is a general desensitisation – to a variety of things, including commercialisation, blood and guts violence and sex. On average, it is estimated that the consumer is bombarded with 3000 advertising images and sounds every day, according to Jesper Kunde in *Unique Now... Or Never* (2002) reviewed on www.marketingweb.co.za (26/09/03). This brand exhaustion and desensitisation to adverts goes hand in hand with a thirst for ever more sensational news. It often seems that the media is in a race with itself to provide the most shocking and explicitly violent or sexual stories and images to readers that seem to have an insatiable thirst for information about other people's obsessions, perversions, crimes and misdeeds, other country's misfortunes, famines and wars and other people's bodies and sex lives. McLuhan suggests that "the press is a group confessional form that provides communal participation" (1994:204), allowing the embedded voyeurism in every reader, and society at large, to take centre stage in the act of reading media.

From this perspective, therefore, it becomes clear that there is much more to the act of reading media than the need to gather information, about the performance of stocks, political developments, socio-economic problems, the latest corporate takeovers, or what kind of entertainment is available in one's city over the weekend. The act of reading media is the act of participation in a great public display of experience. The act of reading media is the act of extending one's senses beyond the local *and* deeper into the local, it is a profound psycho-social act that makes a plethora of other people part of our daily lives without any responsibilities attached.

Reading media is one of the easiest and therefore most gratifying forms of voyeurism available to readers that are easily bored, generally fairly lazy about the task of reading and massively over stimulated by an over-abundance of texts in a plethora of mediums.

Salman Rushdie describes the passive and unperturbed situation of the modern media mega-reader quite succinctly:

In the world outside TV, our numbed senses already require increasing doses of titillation. One murder is barely enough; only mass murderers make the front pages. You have to blow up a building full of people or machine-gun a whole royal family to get our attention. Soon, perhaps, you'll have to kill off a whole species of wildlife or unleash a virus that wipes out people by the thousand or else you'll be small potatoes. You'll be on an inside page (2003:380).

Aristotle, as Barthes explains in *Criticism and Truth*, calls this generalised and shared attitude towards reading "verisimilitude". This "aesthetics of readership" is the correspondence of discourse to what the public believes is possible. Such opinions on what is possible are created by tradition, the majority, current opinion, etc. (1987:30). In a similar vein, I would argue that there exists a kind of media verisimilitude, where the general public has shared interests in what is considered interesting and how it should be presented to them. Indeed, public opinion and the general values of the moral majority are certainly key elements that come into play in the decisions of media producers in the media texts that they create (and of course, are created by them too). Verisimilitude is evident in attitudes and opinions that rely on normative, evident truths and that generally agree that certain things go without saying – an attitude that I would argue is fairly prevalent in the media readership.

If as some critics might suggest, the meaning of a text is a reader's experience of it (Culler, 1989:65), then the "meaning" of media is in many respects defined by the general public – and what they buy and the fact that the very next day, they may line their cat-litter boxes or wrap their fish and chips in that very text.

It is also pertinent to mention that there is an entirely different type of media audience that occurs in developing societies. In a brief article on Marketing Web, the Journal of Marketing (05/05/03) suggests that a new readership is

emerging, in South Africa, one that is made up of “vast numbers of black people flooding into city surroundings that have turned to the media for education, job prospects, gambling, safety and security tips, health advice, loans, backyard vegetable growing, lifestyle guidance and voter education”. Although admitting that “most of what appears here is based on rather thin dipstick research, academic inquiry and anecdotal field research,” the article does raise some interesting points, particularly with regards to the media’s ‘public interest’ role, which is directly related to reader needs and market demand.

The Model Reader

Jonathan Culler explains that the reader is conceived of as a product of codes; a product whose subjectivity is an assemblage of stereotypes (Culler, 1989:33). An author generally imagines an ideal reader and creates a textual structure incorporating that implied reader. This is indeed also true in the case of media. Culler goes on to explain that the “interpretation of a work comes to be an account of what happens to the reader, how various conventions and expectations are brought into play, what connections or hypotheses are posited, how expectations are defeated or confirmed” (35). In a reader oriented criticism of media as text, media theory has spent much time on the impact of media on society, as has been covered in Chapter 2. What I think is crucial, however, is an understanding of how the media reader is perceived and constructed by the media author (cast of authors).

In general, media producers claim to tailor their texts to an understanding of what their audience is looking for. In this sense, then, they consider themselves the producers of products that are to be both literally bought by a *market* and bought into by that market in an ideological sense. The term “market” is absolutely crucial to any discussion of media readership. In general, each instance of media has a specific reader profile that defines their market. These profiles are based almost entirely on demographics, income and lifestyle. Each media instance’s market is crucial to its financial and actual

survival, for it is the market that it sells to its advertisers. McLuhan says that advertisers buy a *piece* of the reader/viewer from the media (1994:207). And like any buyer in a sale transaction, the advertisers want to know what they're going to get for their money.

In South Africa, one of the most widely used market indicators is the South African Advertising Research Foundation's (SAARF) Living Standards Measure (LSM). According to SAARF's Haupt (undated), "The LSM index was designed to profile the market into relatively homogeneous groups. It is based on a set of marketing differentiators which group people according to their living standards, using criteria such as degree of urbanisation and ownership of cars and major appliances (assets). Naturally, the LSM bands are not airtight pockets. LSMs bring together groupings of people out of the total population continuum into contiguous and sometimes slightly overlapping groups. Essentially, the LSM is a wealth measure based on standard of living rather than income – in fact, income does not appear anywhere within the LSMs at all". In the LSM, the population is divided into ten groups, from 1 at the bottom to 10 at the top. The LSMs are calculated using 29 variables identified by SAARF in its All Media & Product Survey (AMPS)¹⁷. SAARF urges marketers not to use the LSM in isolation; it should be combined with other indicators such as life stage and income to create a proper profile of the market being targeted. For the purposes of this paper, however, the existence of the LSM is enough to demonstrate that media owners and marketers of other consumer products, research and construct ideas of their ideal markets – which is congruent to the imagination of an ideal reader.

Consider these descriptions of media markets:

In its July 2003 advertisement rate card, *FHM* magazine describes its readership as "a total of 438 000 readers, 313 000 of whom are male. These male readers (mean age 26) boast the highest average household income

¹⁷ See www.saarf.co.za for the list of indicators.

(R12 058.40) of all the magazines competing in the men's lifestyle category. They are well-educated and affluent and therefore are premium prospects for advertising aimed at South African men". In a different document describing its readers, *FHM* offers advertisers a "psychographic description" of their reader: he is a "younger man in the 'glory years' of his mid-twenties. He's independent, educated, more-than-likely single, with high personal disposable income. He's a highly active consumer, sociable, gregarious, seeking entertainment and information on a wide variety of topics".

The Sunday Independent newspaper describes its reader as follows: "Our readers are well-read, well-heeled; they buy from places like Boardmans and Woolworths, they order imported pates from Thrupps, enjoy the best whisky, imported beer and wines and travel to exotic destinations for their holidays. They thoroughly discuss the issues of the day and hold opinions that are well thought out and considered. They are bright, educated and affluent. They know what they want and how and where to get it. Our potential readers include the 'aspirant'; those up-and-coming youthful men and women who aspire to own the better things, live the good life". (Rantao, J. *Letter from the Editor* available at www.iol.co.za).

The Sowetan offers detailed information on its readers, explaining that "33% of our readers are aged between 25 and 34 with 24% and 32% being aged [sic] between 16-24 and 35-49 respectively". Furthermore, "40% or 775 000 of Sowetan's readers earn in excess of R2500 per month. This constitutes more than the total readership of our nearest rivals. These readers are extremely brand conscious and upwardly mobile and form the perfect customers for branded products". Finally, "The typical activities undertaken by a Sowetan reader on a daily basis are eating out, playing lotto, gardening and exercising," and "78% of Sowetan readers own their own property while 93% have access to electricity" (www.thengisamedia.co.za).

In this context, Barthes' comment about the imagined audience of women's fashion magazines is particularly supportive. He says (1985:58):

... [E]veryone who has ever read a fashion magazine is familiar with the typical image of a woman projected by these publications. It's essentially a contradictory image, it must be admitted, since this woman must be *everything* at once in order to represent the greatest possible number of woman readers. Although she is a busy executive secretary, she relaxes during the day and has ample time for every holiday. She goes off to the country every weekend and travels constantly to Capri, the Canary Islands, Tahiti, and yet every trip takes her to the South of France. She loves absolutely everything, from Pascal to the latest jazz. She never engages in adultery or affairs; she travels only with her husband; she never has financial worries. In short, she is both what the woman reader is and what she dreams of being.

While the image of the ideal reader of fashion magazines may have changed a little in the twenty years since Barthes said this (she is now more likely to be single, sexually active, work in some kind of glamorous industry like "event management" and the most important person in her life would be her best friend) there is no doubt about the fact that the structure of the idea of this reader has not changed – she is still expected to be everything at once in order to represent the greatest possible number of readers.

An important point that these description of target audiences reveals is a homogenization of the reader – something unique to media as text. Reading has generally been understood as an individual act: "Reading is a necessarily individual act, far more than writing. If we assume that writing manages to go beyond the limitations of the author, it will continue to have a meaning only when it is read by a single person and passes through his mental circuits. Only the ability to be read by a given individual proves that what is written shares in the power of writing, a power based on something beyond the individual" (Calvino, 1998:176). Our literary understanding of the reader as an actor in a symbolic communicative process is severely undercut by media author's tendency to conflate all the discrete individuals who would read and interpret their texts in unique ways with the sterile profile of the type of reader that they sell to advertisers. In some ways then, the target audience myth is

one manner in which media authors and owners have fantasised their readers for economic gain.

At this point, it is also worth briefly revisiting Baudrillard's argument that through the hyperreality of the media, the mass homogenised audience is able to subversively escape the power play of the mass media by deflecting the responsibility for choices to the producers of the media objects that they consume. (See the subsection "Media and the Hyperreal" in Chapter 2). As discussed, this theoretical escape of the media audience does not take account of the actual effect of the media on audiences' lives and it is therefore not surprising that audience research, and an ongoing construction of the media reader, continues to take place in both the academic and marketing fraternities.

Livingstone argues that "once textual and literary theorists had made the crucial transition to a reader-oriented approach, context flooded in for two reasons: first, the shift from asking about the meaning of the text in and of itself, to asking about the meaning of the text as achieved by a particular, contextualized reader (shift from virtual to realized text); second, the shift from asking about the meaning of the text to asking about the intelligibility of the text" (2003:344). This highlights the shift in approaches in media studies to include audience analysis. However, this shift has not yet assessed the literary construct of media target markets that has also defined media production.

In order to arrive at these reader profiles, media owners implement the kind of market research that most product manufacturers would do in order to find out whether their products would sell in the open market. Through questionnaires, focus groups and consumer interviews, media owners are not only able to glean whether their product has a market, but what to do to make their media-product more desirable and effective in attracting the type of reader advertisers want. And the readers that advertisers want are, to be blunt, those

with money to spend on their products (hence the insistence on the part of all the media owners cited above, behind all the complimentary language, that their readers have disposable income).

The need to attract and please advertisers has led to an interesting construction of the reader – in a literal as well as metaphorical sense. In the latter, media texts are compelled to describe their readers and construct content in order to attract and please such readers. In the former, they also shape society through the content that they create. Most advertisers in women's consumer magazines, for example, are keen to target a market that has self-improvement and personal aesthetics as a major concern in life. The editorial in women's consumer magazines is carefully shaped to provoke and create such needs in women, quite subtly, of course (and sometimes not). It's also interesting to note that the most successful media (in terms of their readership and advertising revenue) are those that have most successfully constructed the needs in society that their advertisers step in neatly to cater to. Need to look sexy for that dream date? In steps a clothing retailer. Need to stimulate the opposite sex's desire with scent? In steps the latest designer fragrance. Need to put a tasty meal on the table? In steps Woolworths Foods. Need to look sporty yet chic? In steps Nike.

Was the reader always such a consumption-driven image-conscious fanatic? It's hard to say whether the media simply catered to such contemporary obsessions (as they will probably argue) or created them (as social behaviourists are likely to argue). Indeed, as Culler cautions, there is a constant shift between and a crucial need to differentiate between readers' decisive actions and readers' automatic responses (Culler, 1989:73). In large part, readers simply respond automatically to the media.

Of course, not all potential readers are preoccupied with such shallow, consumerist issues. In fact, as Mark Crispin Miller pointed out in his article referenced earlier, large sectors of society, such as the working class and the

poor, are marginalised by mainstream media. There are few magazines out there offering tips on money saving ways to recycle waste, for example, or tips on how to build township shacks more effectively in the winter months, or tips on how to encourage one's children to attend school even though their uniforms are too small and the teachers may be abusive. This is not because there is no need for such information, but because advertisers have little need for people who need that kind of information. In all fairness, of course, there are media that do cater to the needs and interests of the poor and the working classes (and advertisers who are interested in their admittedly limited funds). In general, however, even these media exploit the trickle-down effects of rampant consumerism and use it to their own benefit.

The constructed reader has interesting and profound implications on the media text and on media authorship. In fact, in many ways, this construction of the reader as a market is one of the primary factors influencing the type of texts that are created. The construction of an imagined reader is not something that is exclusive to media as text; in fact it is common to all authors or texts. With this in mind, it may be worthwhile to consider the media's construction of its reader as the market within the context of Umberto Eco's Model Reader.

It is interesting to consider media as a literature within the frameworks of Eco's own theory in part, because of his strong belief that the aesthetics of popular culture should be analysed seriously (Bondanella, 1997:41). In fact, Eco even uses the media as a further channel: "in the fast-moving journalistic columns of weekly news magazines, Eco has perhaps found the perfect expression for his rapidly changing perspectives on developments in popular culture" (Bondanella, 1997:46). Eco rejects the general intellectual objection to the vulgarisation of high culture that supposedly takes place in the media (47) and expects the intellectual elite to engage with and analyse it with as much seriousness as they do 'high art'. Nevertheless, Eco sees the great fault of the mass media as the conveyance of a standardised, oversimplified, static and

complacent vision that masks the real complexity of things and implicitly denies the possibility of change (52). Eco says that “messages in popular culture must be decoded to reveal their latent ideological content in order to prevent the mass media from becoming an instrument of passive control” (Bondanella, 1997:53).

This thesis has attempted to argue that there is indeed a shared discourse and tone that pervades the media text, which is derived in part from the interests of the pervasive profit-oriented media owner. Certainly, I also hope that I have demonstrated that there is indeed a standardised and oversimplified vision that informs most media production and therefore pervades the content of media texts produced. What I have also argued is that media authors also author the media reader, defining and constructing them as a market, which is largely as part of a commercially motivated transaction, making the media, in many respects, an instrument of ideological control, and above all, profiteering.

This final point bears, in my opinion, directly on Eco’s argument of a Model Reader. To begin with, Eco “prefers not to call interpretation ‘decoding’ but rather ‘understanding’, on the basis of some previous decoding, the general sense of a vast portion of discourse” (Bondanella, 1997:85). Eco also argues that the reader never wants to completely betray the author’s intentions in his efforts to understand the author’s text. Furthermore, Eco argues that mass communications is a powerful instrument that is nevertheless impossible to control completely, because as a closed text, it is open to almost any unintended authorial interpretation. This is certainly true: the media is full of texts that are ripe pickings for completely unintended interpretations: consider artist Stephen Cohen’s work *The Burden of Media* (see Appendix 10), which he performed in Times Square in New York. With a collection of South African newspaper headline posters as a backdrop, Cohen, wearing a tutu and leopard print high heels, danced in front of the wallpaper he had created, “trumpeting the daily violence and absurdities of South African life” and with

characteristic Cohen-esque exhibitionism, scored his arms with a pin and stripped naked before exiting the scene (www.artthrob.co.za, 2003). I'm no art critic, and I won't attempt to comment here on the artfulness of the work, but I'm pretty sure that the cast of authors involved in creating the various media texts advertised on the posters in the subway in New York did not foresee Cohen as a Model Reader.

A Model Reader is, Eco explains, "a possible reader supposedly able to deal interpretively with the expressions in the same way that the author deals generatively with them" (Bondanella, 1997:90). This reader is foreseen by the author at the point of encoding the text, and who is prepared to follow textual inferences, outside of the text itself if necessary, in order to gather an understanding of what he is reading. The model reader is "posited by the intention of the text" (129).

As I have argued above, there is no doubt that media texts foresee a very specific type of reader and manage to gather enough evidence that they are attracting such readers; otherwise they would struggle to sell advertising and essentially wither and die. This market is defined in terms of its ability to buy the products that are to be advertised in the space that the media text offers. Furthermore, a large degree of media content is designed in order to appeal to this model reader, and a large and extensive cast of authors is involved in trying to please, coax, seduce and inspire the reader. Each media text, therefore, has an ideal reader in mind, their 'market', for whom they tailor-make the entire text. The manner in which the media is dealt with generatively – in a surface, comfortable and conveniently digestible format – is most certainly how it is consumed. Did the media create the model reader, or did the model reader create the media?

All of these instances of supra-textuality, as I have termed the superseding contextual factors that make media organisation behave in similar ways and produce similar products, are even more convincing of the argument that the

various multitude of media texts that exist in society today are part of a larger textual system that defines media and that should play a part in how we analyse it. To recap, the supra-textual issues at play are mainly those of media authorship, a complex system of encoding that includes a large cast of players, both vertical top-down actors employed by the media monoliths that own the media and competing private interests that influence content with horizontal pressures. The conception of a cast of authors defined by both vertical and horizontal actors is crucial because it does not exclude one set of players at the expense of another; indeed, it would be futile only to analyse the role of editorial staff in the creation and encoding of media texts without considering the role and influence of the public relations industry. Similarly, it would be futile, for example, to analyse and assess the impact of design and layout on media authorship without taking into account the influence of the advertising sector. The supra-textual links that forge the megatext are very much issues of authorship, which cannot be approached without considering the various and multiple nature of authorship. Furthermore, it is crucial to understand that the process of authoring the reader, which is central to the activities and self-projection of all media texts, is a supra-textual activity that homogenises the reader and disregards, to a large degree, the role of individual interpretation in the process of reading media.

At this point, it is timely to recap the arguments outlined in this thesis with a view to pulling it all together in a definition of the media as megatext.

"We should take care not to merely monumentalise that which we should seek to interrogate."

John Mowitt, *Text: The Genealogy of an Antidisciplinary Object* (10)

Chapter 6

Towards Another (Literary?) Understanding of Media: The Megatext

Literary approaches to texts typically seek to offer textual interpretations that explore aesthetic value, but this practice has been surpassed by the assessment of various other textual prerogatives that tend to trump the notion of beauty every time. A literary approach to media is one that is not concerned with aesthetics at all, which is ironic considering that while most media are themselves preoccupied with a shallow sense of aesthetics, their presentation and style of language often leave much to be aesthetically desired. The text has indeed gone pop (Mowitt, 1992) and this pervasive populism of textuality can be overwhelming, something that has perhaps prompted us to approach the spate of new pop texts, most specifically media, the most "pop" a text can go, with caution, perhaps only considering them one or two at a time. Even the growth of film and media schools, often emerging from literature departments, has not seemed able to keep pace with the rapid developments of media. While much time is devoted to analysis of individual texts or groups of texts, academia has not yet developed tools of analysis with which to approach the field in its textual entirety. The media as a megatext continues to change and develop at an astonishing pace; yet textual approaches to media have remained slow and ponderous. If we don't take proactive measures to keep up with the minefield of competing and repeating texts that are media, we risk being left behind, equipped only with outdated and antiquated notions of textuality that, although aesthetically rewarding, retrospectively useful and infinitely helpful in the one-on-one study of texts, do not serve us at all if we wish to ride the warp-speed wave of media, with it, into the future.

This thesis has attempted to map the way towards an understanding of media as megatext, through a process that first offered a description of approaches to media studies to date, then showed how the existence of multiple media

texts are a reality through a description of the media matrix. Then, a discussion showing the inter-textual links shared between the various multiple media texts that exist led on to a discussion of the supra-textual commonalities shared by the media, the overarching context within which media operate. This process was meant to show how, on these various levels of analysis, the links between seemingly diverse media texts are so overwhelming in number and connectivity that it may be useful to approach the study of media as though it were one text genre, even as though it were one text.

If I may draw the reader's eye back towards Mowitt's opening caution to this conclusion, it is important to point out that the concept of the megatext does not seek to provide an easy answer to the manifold and immense challenges to the study of textuality that the media presents. The megatext is no mere monumentalisation, it is posited as a potential starting point from which further interrogations that bear in mind the immense size of the media may be initiated. It is a concept that seeks to be as big as the challenges facing the study of textuality that the media have introduced; a theoretical tool that matches the size of the theoretical object that we wish better to understand. The megatext is a potential alternative description for the media, an alternative description that captures three of the core defining elements of media: firstly, the immense number of text objects within, and reach of, the field; secondly the fact that each media object is essentially a text in its own right; and thirdly that these media texts are all connected. These characteristics of media, namely that any media object is merely one of many million and that every media object is simultaneously a text and an exercise in textuality (as are all of its colleagues in the mass media), are crucial base points from which any discussion of media must begin, and are successfully captured in the term "megatext".

As I hope I have succeeded in suggesting in the introduction to this thesis, the concept of "mega" (one million) is not as outrageous as some might think; it is

in fact quite a conservative projection of how many media texts exist under the umbrella of popular culture and mass communication, considering the earlier description of the media matrix. The mega is again multiplied when we realise that within each media artefact are scores, sometimes hundreds of other texts, and that within each of those texts a multitude of voices is represented. Furthermore, considering that the media is constantly renewed and that a cast of authors is at play in the construction of these texts and subtexts, it becomes clear that all these media texts and subtexts are linked by a variety of inter-textual and contextual phenomena. These include, in particular, the cultures of production and consumption that inform the idealisation of the media audience by the producers. That there are at once many producers responsible for the shape of the media and a limited number of discrete corporate personalities that own media and direct the flow of capital through them allows the shape of the megatext to emerge more clearly.

This shape will never emerge absolutely. It would be a mistake to try too hard to map the boundaries of this megatext, whose dimensions we are just beginning to discern. The face of mass media is amorphous; it changes its form every single day, constantly renewing and rewriting itself. It is for this reason that it would be futile to focus for too long on any single aspect of the media or to study discrete media texts too closely. They will be obsolete and rewritten before the analysis is even midway. It is this understanding of the speed at which media transforms that led to a decision to avoid, as far as possible, a microscopic view of media in this thesis, one that would have necessitated blocking out the bigger picture in order to focus on a small circumference. Even the practical examples that I chose to attach in Appendices are largely irrelevant, they are random and, without this context unimportant, examples of bigger principles that are evident throughout media as text.

The megatext can also be understood as a web or matrix of texts. Instead of considering the megatext as a massive bundle of texts, consider it as the

invisible filament that bonds these texts together. The threads are more crucial than the text-objects that are bonded; the threads are multiple and ever-multiplying, as are the texts which are the objects of bonding. The media is united by its own fabric of discourse, something that is evident across media genres and subject matters.

The megatext may help us to understand media more intimately from a macro perspective, avoiding the trap of focussing for too long on partial aspects of media texts that are dynamic by their very nature. It is important to develop ideas that allow us to approach the media as a textual system, informed by very specific authorial and readership patterns, and resulting in specific text codes that are consistently repeated in the public domain. Instead of taking note of the text objects that are produced and re-produced and re-reproduced (and so on), it is necessary to assess the textual structures from which the mass media springs. This thesis has, hopefully, opened an enquiry into further structural-textual analysis of the system of the media by positing the concept of the megatext as a starting point. The megatext, is, to use an old cliché, much more than the sum of its parts. To try and understand it, or what the term might represent under further intellectual and systemic analysis, would not be to identify various discrete media objects and try to patch them together. This would result only in a patchwork. It would be to identify the underlying textual and contextual patterns that inform the outward manifestations of the literary objects that we are bombarded with on a day to day basis, and use those to perceive a larger textual reality that is implicit in media. The megatext, then, is a potential opening into a new literary philosophy of media that will allow us to understand, analyse and comment upon a phenomenon that is an integral part of contemporary society and our lives.

A preliminary definition of the megatext, therefore, may be offered as follows:

The megatext, a theoretical umbrella concept that captures the textually massive phenomenon of contemporary media, is made up of millions of media texts of various genres, dealing with various subject categories, appearing at

various time frequencies and distributed to various geographical locations; each produced by a massive and often overlapping cast of authors, including both vertical and horizontal actors, and each intended for consumption by a specific, often overlapping, imagined audience (the market); and which are linked by (i) inter-textual threads manifested in the abundant transposition of information content, presentation of that content, narrative styles, and common media tone and methodology and (ii) supra- or contextual economic, social and political realities of the post-modern capitalist environment in which they operate, defined largely by mega media ownership and a largely uncompromising consumerist imperative.

The question that now arises is: what do we do with this megatext? In traditional literary analysis we generally seek to achieve our own experiences of textual bliss, the kind of *jouissance* that Barthes compared to *la petit mort*, sexual orgasm. We pursue the text with an anticipatory delight, hoping to allow it to subsume our own identities in a moment where the “frame of one’s analysis opens itself to the dispersion of the consciousness behind the text” (Mowitt, 1992:124).

As hunters of this kind of abstract textual pleasure, we tend only to hunt prey of a particular size and strength; after all, we may be the most conscious and self-aware of animals but our teeth and nails cannot compete with those of some of our more vicious relatives; we know our limits. As hunters of texts, we similarly choose our prey carefully; knowing that when we reach those longed-for seconds of momentary textual death, our own identities will open up and therefore dissolve, rendering us momentarily free.

This thesis has chosen a new kind of literary prey, one that scares us. Indeed, I have elicited cries of caution at almost every turn. For if we choose to hunt a megatext, whether we conceive of its metaphor as a herd of a million charging beasts or as a racing mammoth, we know that there is the chance that when we reach that moment of *jouissance* our *petit mort* may not be that *petit* after all. We are conditioned to the search for bite-size pieces of textual *jouissance* because, ultimately, we do not wish to be more than momentarily textually

free. If we choose to hunt a megatext and succeed in capturing it, our moment of subsuming the self in the little death of textual pleasure may mutate into a moment of textual megadeath, a prospect that does not seem so pleasurable after all.

The question then, is: Will we continue to ignore the conception of media as megatext because of the risk of literary megadeath?

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Appendix 1
South Africa's Print Media Matrix

NAME	FREQUENCY	GENRE	DISTRIBUTION	SUBJECT MATTER
Beeld	Daily	Newspaper	Regional	News & Current Affairs
AA Traveller	Quarterly	Magazine	National	Niche: Travel
Animal Talk	Alternate Monthly	Magazine	National	Niche: Animals
Art South Africa	Quarterly	Magazine	National	Niche: Contemporary Art
Baba & Kleuter	Monthly	Magazine	National	Niche: Parenting
Bike SA Magazine	Monthly	Magazine	National	Niche: Motorbikes
Blunt Magazine	Monthly	Magazine	National	Niche: Skateboarding
Bona	Monthly	Magazine	National	Consumer
Burger, Die	Daily	Newspaper	Regional	News & Current Affairs
Burger, Die (Sat)	Weekly	Newspaper	Regional	News & Current Affairs
Business Day	Daily	Newspaper	National	News & Current Affairs
Cape Ads	Weekly	Newspaper	Regional	Niche: Classifieds
Cape Argus	Daily	Newspaper	Regional	News & Current Affairs
Cape Times	Daily	Newspaper	Regional	News & Current Affairs
Car	Monthly	Magazine	National	Niche: Cars
Caravan & Outdoor Life	Monthly	Magazine	National	Niche: Caravans
Citizen	Daily	Newspaper	Regional	News & Current Affairs
Citizen Weekend Edition (Sat)	Weekly	Newspaper	Regional	News & Current Affairs
City Press	Weekly	Newspaper	National	News & Current Affairs
Club Magazine (Foschini Group)	Monthly	Magazine	National	Prestige
Club Magazine (Lewis/Best Electric)	Monthly	Magazine	National	Prestige
Compleat Golfer	Monthly	Magazine	National	Consumer/Corporate
Conde Nast House & Garden	Monthly	Magazine	National	Consumer
Cosmopolitan	Monthly	Magazine	National	Consumer
D.F. Advertiser	Daily	Newspaper	Regional	News & Current Affairs
Daily Dispatch	Daily	Newspaper	Regional	News & Current

				Affairs
Daily News	Daily	Newspaper	Regional	News & Current Affairs
Daily Sun	Daily	Newspaper	National	News & Current Affairs
De Kat	Quarterly	Magazine	National	Consumer
Discovery	Quarterly	Magazine	National	Prestige
Dish/Skottel (Dstv Guide)	Monthly	Magazine	National	Niche: TV
Dit (Die Idees Tydskrif)	Monthly	Magazine	National	Consumer
Drive	Monthly	Magazine	National	Niche: Cars
Drum	Weekly	Magazine	National	Consumer
East Cape Weekend Post	Weekly	Newspaper	Regional	News & Current Affairs
Elle	Monthly	Magazine	National	Consumer
Enterprise	Monthly	Magazine	National	Niche: Business
Essentials	Monthly	Magazine	National	Consumer
Fair Lady	Monthly	Magazine	National	Consumer
Farmer's Weekly	Weekly	Magazine	National	Niche: Farming
Femina	Monthly	Magazine	National	Consumer
FHM	Monthly	Magazine	National	Consumer
Finance Week	Weekly	Magazine	National	Niche: Finance
Financial Mail	Weekly	Magazine	National	Niche: Finance
Finansies & Tegniek	Weekly	Magazine	National	Niche: Finance
Finesse	Monthly	Magazine	National	Consumer
Fit	Monthly	Magazine	National	Consumer
Food & Home Ent.	Monthly	Magazine	National	Consumer
Getaway	Monthly	Magazine	National	Niche: Travel
Glamour	Monthly	Magazine	National	Consumer
GQ	Alternate Monthly	Magazine	National	Consumer
Habitat	Monthly	Magazine	National	Consumer
Heat	Weekly	Magazine	National	Consumer
Herald	Daily	Newspaper	Regional	News & Current Affairs
Herald (Sat)	Weekly	Newspaper	Regional	News & Current Affairs
House & Leisure	Monthly	Magazine	National	Consumer
Huisgenoot	Weekly	Magazine	National	Consumer
Ilanga	Weekly	Newspaper	Regional	News & Current Affairs
Imagine/Droom (Edgars Club)	Monthly	Magazine	National	Prestige
Independent On Saturday	Weekly	Newspaper	Regional	News & Current Affairs

Insig	Monthly	Magazine	National	Consumer
Isolezwe	Weekly	Newspaper	Regional	News & Current Affairs
Itch	Quarterly	Magazine	National	Niche: Creative
Jet Club	Monthly	Magazine	National	Prestige
Joy	Monthly	Magazine	National	Consumer
Junk Mail	Weekly	Newspaper	Regional	Niche: Classifieds
Kickoff	Weekly	Magazine	National	Niche: Soccer
Landbouweekblad	Weekly	Magazine	National	Niche: Farming
Living & Loving	Monthly	Magazine	National	Consumer
Longevity	Monthly	Magazine	National	Consumer
Mail & Guardian	Weekly	Newspaper	National	News & Current Affairs
Marie Claire	Monthly	Magazine	National	Consumer
Men's Health	Monthly	Magazine	National	Consumer
Mercury	Weekly	Newspaper	Regional	News & Current Affairs
National Geographic	Monthly	Magazine	National	Niche: Environment
Naweek-Beeld (Sat)	Weekly	Newspaper	Regional	News & Current Affairs
O (The Oprah Magazine)	Monthly	Magazine	National	Consumer
Out There	Monthly	Magazine	National	Niche: Outdoors
The Post (Wed)	Weekly	Newspaper	Regional	News & Current Affairs
PC Format	Monthly	Magazine	National	Niche: Computers
People	Weekly	Magazine	National	Consumer
Personal Finance	Weekly	Newspaper	National	Niche: Finance
Popular Mechanics	Monthly	Magazine	National	Consumer
Post (Weekend)	Weekly	Newspaper	Regional	News & Current Affairs
Pretoria News	Daily	Newspaper	Regional	News & Current Affairs
Pretoria News Weekend (Sat)	Weekly	Newspaper	Regional	News & Current Affairs
Rapport	Weekly	Newspaper	National	News & Current Affairs
Rapport Tydskrif	Weekly	Magazine	National	News & Current Affairs
Reader's Digest	Weekly	Magazine	National	Consumer
Rooi Rose	Monthly	Magazine	National	Consumer
Runners World	Monthly	Magazine	National	Niche: Running
SA 4x4	Monthly	Magazine	National	Niche: 4x4s
SA Computer Magazine	Monthly	Magazine	National	Niche: Computers
SA Country Life	Monthly	Magazine	National	Consumer

SA Cycling Magazine	Monthly	Magazine	National	Niche: Cycling
SA Garden & Home	Monthly	Magazine	National	Consumer
SA Gardening	Monthly	Magazine	National	Niche: Gardening
SA Golf Digest	Monthly	Magazine	National	Niche: Golf
SA Home Owner	Monthly	Magazine	National	Consumer
SA Sports Illustrated	Monthly	Magazine	National	Consumer
Sarie	Monthly	Magazine	National	Consumer
Sat Weekend Argus	Weekly	Newspaper	Regional	News & Current Affairs
Saturday Dispatch	Weekly	Newspaper	Regional	News & Current Affairs
Saturday Star	Weekly	Newspaper	Regional	News & Current Affairs
Sawubona	Monthly	Magazine	National	Prestige
Seventeen	Monthly	Magazine	National	Consumer
Shape	Monthly	Magazine	National	Consumer
SL	Monthly	Magazine	National	Consumer
Son	Daily	Newspaper	National	News & Current Affairs
Sowetan	Daily	Newspaper	National	News & Current Affairs
Sowetan Sunday World	Weekly	Newspaper	National	News & Current Affairs
Style	Monthly	Magazine	National	Consumer
Sunday Independent	Weekly	Newspaper	National	News & Current Affairs
Sunday Sun	Weekly	Newspaper	National	News & Current Affairs
Sunday Times	Weekly	Newspaper	National	News & Current Affairs
Sunday Times Mag.	Weekly	Magazine	National	Consumer
Sunday Tribune	Weekly	Newspaper	Regional	News & Current Affairs
Sunday World	Weekly	Newspaper	National	News & Current Affairs
The Star	Daily	Newspaper	Regional	News & Current Affairs
The Witness	Daily	Newspaper	Regional	News & Current Affairs
Time	Weekly	Magazine	International	News & Current Affairs
Topcar	Monthly	Magazine	National	Niche: Cars
True Love	Monthly	Magazine	National	Consumer
TV Plus	Weekly	Magazine	National	Consumer
Vodaworld Mag.	Monthly	Magazine	National	Prestige

Volksblad	Daily	Newspaper	Regional	News & Current Affairs
Volksblad (Sat)	Weekly	Newspaper	Regional	News & Current Affairs
Vroue Keur	Monthly	Magazine	National	Consumer
Weekend Post	Weekly	Newspaper	Regional	News & Current Affairs
Weekend Sunday Argus	Weekly	Newspaper	Regional	News & Current Affairs
Weekend Witness (Sat)	Weekly	Newspaper	Regional	News & Current Affairs
Wicked	Monthly	Magazine	National	Consumer
Wine Magazine	Monthly	Magazine	National	Consumer
Woman's Value	Monthly	Magazine	National	Consumer
Y Mag	Alternate Monthly	Magazine	National	Consumer
You	Weekly	Magazine	National	Consumer
Your Baby	Monthly	Magazine	National	Niche: Pregnancy
Your Family	Monthly	Magazine	National	Consumer
Your Pregnancy	Monthly	Magazine	National	Niche: Pregnancy

University of Cape Town

Appendix 2: Shark Attack

"The 6m shark that killed Tyna?" *Cape Times*, 16 November 2004

THE 6m SHARK THAT KILLED TYNA?

This picture of a shark off the fishing beaches of the southern Peninsula was taken about 1pm yesterday by City of Cape Town photographer Bruce Sutherland, who was on assignment taking aerial pictures of the Red Lion informal settlement above Simon's Town.

"We were in a chopper when we saw the shark near Sunrise Beach," said Sutherland. "We were about 500m above the water and looked over it clearly. It was about six metres long and about 100m away from the breakers. There was a kite surfer near the shark, but he didn't

realise the shark was so close to him." Sutherland added: "I wanted to get closer, but the pilot did not want to go too low. It's the first time I've seen something like this and, like any other photographer, I wanted to get a good shot."

Fish Hoek mourns after horror attack

HENRIÏT PLESSAS
Staff Reporter

A WOMBAT OF Divers lay on a beach on Jagger's Walk early today, the beach where Tyna Webb always left her toweling bag before plunging into the sea for her regular daily morning swim.

But yesterday a swim was her last. Shortly before 10am an exceptionally large shark, believed to be a 6m Great White, seized the elderly resident of Sunrise Cove, Fish Hoek, in its jaws.

Witnesses who saw the attack from the beach and from the hillside overlooking the bay said the water boiled red then turned red.

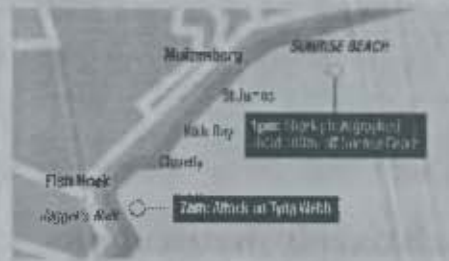
The shark swam out to sea, and Webb was not seen again. All that was found was her red bathing cap.

The official search for her body has been called off.

National Sea Rescue Institute spokesman Craig Lambana said



Victim: Sunny Cove's Tyna Webb



More reports and pictures: Pages 3 & 10

today that the City of Cape Town's law enforcement officials and life guards along Fish Hoek beach would continue to search for the shark for the body.

"The beach is not closed, but officers are advising swimmers

to stay aware," he said. Early today a handful of people were swimming at Fish Hoek beach, in spite of the horror attack.

But they were all in the shallows on the beach or keeping to

the rock pools, and no one had ventured out into the bay where the shark grabbed Webb yesterday.

A few people were watching along Jagger's Walk.

Heads began to bob over the water during a choppy sea, and Webb put up her arms as the shark lunged.

MARK BLOTT, a long-time resident of Fish Hoek, had a gasp today.

"I no longer swim out to the buoy as I did in earlier days. I had Tyna out to swim out so deep. I told all the people here."

"I agree to Tyna's death, but she has a fantastic view of it."

"The fact is city sharks are always here. I used to get fishing net joints and we always came across the sharks. We had to cut them loose from our fishing lines. It is not a new thing."

BloTT said he had been swimming at Fish Hoek for 18 years and he used to swim out to a buoy well off the walls and back to the beach. Now, however, he only goes to waist deep, because he knows the danger is lurking.

Appendix 2: Shark Attack

"My warning could not save Tyna?" *Cape Times*, 16 November 2004



Searching: police divers look for Tyna Webb's body after the shark attack at Fish Hoek beach yesterday.



Warning: Andre Maritz, who works as a spottier for the local fishing crew, tried to alert Webb of the impending danger.

My warning could not save Tyna



Spirited: Tyna Webb, 77, is described as a very independent person with a very good spirit.

TERRI LEZA FONTEIN
Staff Reporter

TYNA WEBB, 77, loved nothing more than to glide through the blue sea off Jagger Walk in Fish Hoek, but yesterday her daily jaunt turned to horror when a large shark, believed to be a Great White, took her in its jaws.

At about 7am yesterday Andre Maritz, 48, was on the mountainside acting as a spotter for the local fishing crew when he saw the shark attack Webb.

"Every morning this woman swims the breakfast swim, but this morning as she was swimming the shark came to inspect and although we swarmed and waved the flag trying to warn her, the shark got hold of her," Maritz said.

Other witnesses on the hill saw the shark speed toward Webb and attack her, then the sea around her bill with blood.

They said the shark had then headed out to sea and she might still have been in its jaws.

Webb's son-in-law Thomas Spies, a local doctor, was at the scene just after 8am.

Spies, who was the first family member on the scene, did not want to discuss the incident yesterday.



Sea lover: Tyna Webb.



Devoted: Tyna Webb and her husband Frank.

By yesterday afternoon several hours after the attack Webb's body had still not been recovered and the family prepared themselves for the worst.

While Webb's daughters, Josephine Spies and Ninky Matthes drink tea in the kitchen of the Spieses' Noordhoek home and friends dropped by to offer last con-

solence, police divers and RML volunteers continued to comb the area where Webb was attacked.

But there was no sign of her. Nothing. Sea Rescue (including the spinners) Greg Lamington said "Tyna Webb is presumed dead in this stage and I think her family has come to terms with that."

Yesterday, Matthes and her

husband Frank, who rushed to Noordhoek from Swartkops after they received news of the incident, said the family was very shocked and traumatised by what had happened.

Matthes said she had two brothers in America who would attend the memorial service. Several other family members were scattered all

over the world.

My mother was an amazing swimmer and she loved nature and being outdoors but the sea was her favourite.

She lived on her own and was always a very independent person with a very good spirit," Maritz said.

Webb, whose given name was Cornelia Matthes, was nicknamed Tyna because she was the youngest and "tiny" of five children.

She was born in Burenburg and obtained a BA, majoring in English and Latin, from the University of the Free State.

She taught in Pretoria and Johannesburg but moved to Cape Town in 1987.

She lived in 22 James before moving to Fish Hoek in 1989.

Webb's husband Jan Webb died about 11 years ago and she has been living alone ever since.

Tyna Matthes described Webb as a very spiritual person who devoted a lot of her time to charity work.

She was also a member of the Fish Hoek Methodist Church and her parish priest, Reverend Bonnie Caswood, said she had been a loved and respected member of the church. She was involved in the church's book club and was also in the church's hospice caregiver. She also contributed to the building of the Methodist Church in Koozberg.

'Attack won't scare off holidaymakers'

TOURISM and conservation officials believe the fatal shark attack on Tyna Webb will not scare people away from beaches near where the tourism industry.

Cape Town Mayor Helen Zille and the Cape Town Regional Chamber of Commerce and Industry said yesterday's shark attack on Webb, 77, at Fish Hoek was rare.

Carmen Viljoen, a spokeswoman for Cape Town Tourism

ARIJAN VAN OOSTERHOUT & BULELANI PHILLIP
Staff Reporters

Viljoen said, "This is just an isolated incident and we are confident that this will not have a major impact on beach tourism."

"We're confident that the authorities will take steps if necessary and we think that

it's important that the right information about the danger of sharks is provided to the public."

Colin Boyd, Deputy Director of the Cape Town Regional Chamber of Commerce & Industry, said: "This is very much an isolated incident and I think it won't be a problem for tourism at all."

The City of Cape Town said the shark attack had been a

Deezee Untent, the city's acting director in charge of beaches, said: "It's a tragic incident. The city has had discussions about how we can forward a people about sharks."

Asked why lifeguards were not on the beaches as early as last year, she said: "It's very difficult at the moment to recruit lifeguards from the Cape in spite of the lifeguards room in St. James and then

a similar incident happens at St. James, what do we do?"

"We are trying to work with the resources that are available to us and respect other people's lives," she said.

Grant said it was difficult to comment on plans to recruit lifeguards.

"We have had some direct advice around this as an option, but it's still a work in progress. We are having ongoing discussions."

Mensvreter!

- 'Rob' toe 'n haai met mens in bek
- Swempet 'ál wat van vrou oorbly'



'n Witvloedhaai soek die een wat in Valsheid afgeneem is deur Chris Falloors was gisteroggend vroeg vermoedelik verantwoordlik vir die aanval op mev. Tanya Webb (77) toe sy 'n haar gelykske voegingstroom naby Valsheid in die see was. Die insidente van Webb is skerp op Valsheid se strand gemerk en is verskaf deur People's Post.

VERHAAGSPAN

KAAPSTAD. "Ek wil nou! weer in die water gaan ná wat ek voorgedag twee maande terug."

So het 'n vroeë van die haar-aanval gisteroggend vroeg op mev. Tanya Webb (77) van Sunny Cove by Valsheid gesê kort ná die aanval wat die gemeenskap gesiek het. Hierdie oggetuie is een van die wat traumaterapie moet ontvang.

Webb, wat die afgelope 17 jaar feitlik elke dag by Sunny Cove swem, is oorspronklik 0655 deur vreesdelik 'n WH doodhaai van by die 5 m swak 150 m van die strand afgesval.

Een van die oggetuies van die aanval, mnr. Paul Tennant, skou-kommande vir

seilvaart van die Valsheid-skiptuik, het die aanval wat sy haai se hals en al aan skrik. "Ek het 'n gaspedal in die water gesien en daer was oral bloed," het hy vertel. "Aanvanklik het dit vir my gelyk soos 'n rok, maar ek word toe 'n haai op die hy 'n mens in sy bek het. Al wat my ooply het, was haar mooi swempet."

Daaruit se verhoofde, die Tanya Berry, het ook gesien hoe die haai Webb aanval. "Hy het Freedom haar gestrek. Daarna het hy haar uit die water getrek en haar toe in sy mond gegryp en rondgesit. Daar was verduidelik baie bloed."

Berry het begin skreeu om 'n ander swemmer se aandag te trek. Tanya Berry het die noodroep gegee, het, het sy en haar drager na die strand gehurloop en almal 'n waarsku.

"Ek sal nooit weer in die water gaan ná wat ek voorgedag twee maande terug," het Berry gesê. "Ek dink haaiete moet dringend aangebring word."

Mnr. Timothy Atkins, 'n swemmer van Oos-Vrystaat, het gesien hoe die haai "skrikke na haar (Webb) swem". "Hy het haar aan die sy gegryp en onder die water afgedruk. Toe hy bloed sien, het hy haar wild geskrik. Hy het rug so twee sekondes gemaak; daarna het ons nie weer die vrou gesien nie."

Mnr. Clive Wakeford, president van die Valsheid lewensreddingsklub, het gesê hy het Webb ná omliggende haai-waarskuwinge gesien toe die op lesse 90 so ver te swem nie. "Maar sy was 'n baie illoosiese vrou en het voel as dit moet gebeur, sal dit gebeur."

'n Rubriekskrywer van *Reis*, Ceelia Cilliers was 'n vriendin van Webb. Cilliers is die ma van Amalín, wat met Webb se oudste seun, Harry, getroud is. Dulle is in die USA.

Cilliers het gesê sy het op 29 Oktober pas noual so uit Amerika terugkeer het. "Hy Webb ook sien. Die haai het Webb gesê: "Coasted by the sea as if coasted by God." "Sou 'n mens dit vertel met 'geleuster deur die see soos ek deur God geleuster word', het ek gepra. "Nee, dit was meer doodsof," was haar antwoord.

Die aanval het alle swemmers afgedruk, maar twee het gisteroggend het 'n wat gelyk dit was in die water te vang. Een van die oggetuies van die aanval, mnr. Tony Dougan, het gesê hy sal voor swem. "Ek swem al 50 jaar lank."

Die haai kan dalk op die gebied geleë gewees het deur die gaspedal van wit swemmer wat vissermannes gisteroggend vrou in 'n troebel in die haai by Valsheid gevang het. Volgens die Nasionale Seereddingsinstansie (NSRI) is die swemmer vrygestel omdat dit oewerlig is om dit in te bring te vang. Die swemmer het die haai gesien náby waar die wissel geleë is.

Haaioggetuies met wie die sturmer gepunt het, was dit eens dat die aanval van hantou na die jongste aanval oor haagtig en was.

Vriende saam met wat Webb gelyk gaan swem het, het verduin op die strand rondgesien. M. Carla Roman het gesê sy het vroeëoggend gehoor hoe die vissermannes skreeu. "Ek het skrik toe gehardloop en toe ek daar kom, het ek 'n groot

vin in die water gesien. Ek het besef daer's 'n haai in die water saam met haar (Webb)." Volgens haar was daar Sondag twee haai-waarskuwinge en ook een verlede Saterdag.

Nadat klam gemaak is, het 'n reddingswaartog van die NSRI saam met 'n helikopter van die Suid-Afrikaanse Hoofkruis se Air Mercy Service en die vloot die gebied gelyk. Volgens mnr. Len Klomper, woordvoerder van die NSRI, het hulle 'n reuse-haai uit die helikopter gemaak.

Enwan die NSRI boot Webb se swempet oopgepik het, was daar min laai gisteroggend steeds geen teken van haar liggaam nie. Die soeking deur 'n polisiekommando is afgeleë.

Die strand was sluit tot 20:00 gesluit.



Chinese firms court the continent's governments and rake in goodwill in return

Quiet superpower seduces Africa

Andrew Quinn

Reuters

CRUMBLING sport stadiums stand in many African capitals, enduring symbols of China's cold war courtship of the world's poorest continent during the 1960s and 1970s.

That was before the Communist giant embraced capitalism and transformed itself into probably the world's fastest growing economy.

Now the Chinese are back in Africa, promoting business deals and strengthening diplomatic ties in a strategic push that analysts say marks sharp new competition for the continent's rich resources.

From west African oilfields, where Chinese companies rub shoulders with western multinationals, to central African mines, Beijing's Africa outreach is raising eyebrows in some western capitals, which sense a serious new player on the continent.

"China's role in Africa is a major emerging trend," says Jackie Gilliers of the Institute for Security Studies.

"Everyone is watching to see how far it will go."

It is already deep into Zambia's agricultural heartland, where Chinese farmers are increasingly raising the vegetables that are on sale at Lusaka's street markets.

In Botswana Chinese firms have a virtual monopoly on the construction business. China is helping Nigeria launch satellites, promoting cellphones in Zimbabwe and adding peacekeepers to United Nations operations across Africa.

Chinese officials are quick to point out that China is no newcomer to Africa. Their explorers had direct sea links with the continent as early as AD700, long before Europeans arrived.

In the 1960s, China's communist rulers worked to befriend African governments as they promoted political independence from western and Soviet superpowers.

"China and Africa shared similar experiences, both suffered from aggression, plunder and enslavement by colonialists," says Liu Guijin, the Chinese ambassador to SA and one of Beijing's top Africa hands.

China's leaders now spotlight these historical links for modern economic objectives, promoting Beijing as a reliable partner who has no interest in lecturing Africa on sensitive subjects such as human rights, governance and corruption.

"From an African perspective, there is sympathy for the Chinese position, which is premised on respect for sovereignty," says Gilliers.

This approach is expected to help boost overall China-Africa trade to more than \$20bn this year, double the level in 2000. It has also won China staunch allies, led by Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe, who set a policy of "looking east" after western powers imposed sanctions on his government.

State-owned Air Zimbabwe this month struck a deal with Chinese authorities to begin scheduled flights to Beijing.

China is already the biggest buyer of Zimbabwean tobacco, and this month a top Chinese delegation visited Harare to sign deals on telecoms, agriculture and tourism.

Zambia has also benefited from China's rediscovered interest in Africa, with Chinese private and state enterprises investing more than \$265m between 2002 and 2004 in Zambia, most of it in copper.

China has also given grants for maintaining the Tanzania-Zambia railway — built by Chinese engineers sent by chairman Mao Zedong in the 1960s — and Z-Cell, the cellphone subsidiary of Zambia's state telecommunications firm.

China's Africa push is spurred in large part by its mounting hunger for raw materials, especially oil.

China is locking in long-term contracts with Nigeria and Angola — which already supply it with as much oil as Saudi Arabia — while



Chinese farmers are increasingly growing the produce that is on sale on African streets.

Picture: SUNDAY TIMES

China's state oil group owns 40% of Sudan's Greater Nile crude project and is looking at projects in possible new oil sources such as Niger.

China's oil operations in Africa put it in competition with western oil giants, whose high-handed methods have at times irritated their African hosts in the past.

"Many of the African governments like Chinese companies to come here to give some balance to the current situation, which is dominated by western multinationals," says Liu.

There are also political payoffs for Beijing as it tightens its African

links. Chief among these, analysts say, is limiting the diplomatic activities of Taiwan — which Beijing calls a breakaway province — and counterbalancing what China sees as resurgent "hegemony" on the part of the US.

China has stepped up the level and frequency of its official visits to Africa, and has established a diplomatic panel to guide relations.

Chinese products are also increasingly making inroads into African markets, often carried by small traders whose cheap household goods, toys and trinkets can be found from Kinshasa to Cape Town.

Toddler plunges to his death

CANDICE BAILEY
Staff Reporter

A MAN faces a charge of murder after a 22-month-old toddler plummeted to his death from a fourth-floor window in a block of flats.

Jared Peacock died of head injuries.

Neighbours at the Sea Point block said the man, who is due to appear in the Cape Town Magistrate's Court tomorrow, was reportedly babysitting Jared when the toddler fell to his death at about 5pm on Saturday.

Jared's mother, Andrea Peacock, was apparently at work.

She was renting the flat in Revendale Flats, on the corner of High Level Road and St John's Avenue.

Police said Peacock had received trauma counselling and was being consoled by close friends.

It is not clear whether Jared fell from the flat's balcony or from an open window in the lounge, where he slept.

There were no burglar bars on the window.

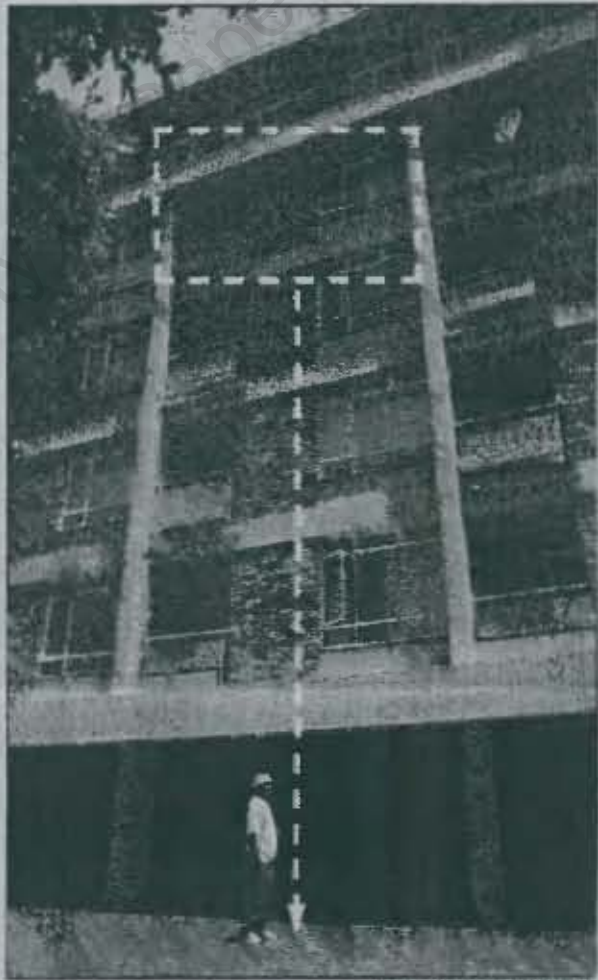
The course of events is not clear, but a second-floor resident, identified only as Isabelle, told another neighbour she had encountered the man outside the entrance to the block of flats.

Isabelle told her neighbour, "Mrs B", that the man had been carrying the baby boy in his arms.

He wanted Isabelle to open the block's door, shouting: "Open the f****g door, (the) boy is dead."

Mrs B, who lives on the first floor and declined to give her full name, said: "Isabelle came to my flat and said: 'Please come help me. The baby on the fourth floor is dead and the man won't let me help.'"

As Mrs B called security and an ambulance, she heard a commotion upstairs, which "sounded like things were being thrown around".



Tragedy: caretaker Livingstone Mgedesi at the spot where toddler Jared Peacock landed after he fell from the fourth floor of a block of Sea Point flats.

When security officials arrived, they and the neighbours went upstairs and found Jared lying on his bed under the open lounge window.

The man was sitting on a nearby couch.

Mrs B said: "Paramedics and rescue services tried to revive the boy but after about an hour everyone left. It's such a pity. He was such a cute, happy little boy."

Asked about Jared's mother, she said: "I have never seen the mother - she

works all the time."

She described the man as "a polite, friendly man who always smiled".

Revendale Flats caretaker Livingstone Mgedesi said he did not know anything about the little boy's death because he had not been at the flats on Saturday.

Mgedesi said of the man: "I thought he was a good man."

Police spokesman Captain Billy Jones said: "The motive for the incident is still unknown, but police are investigating."

Appendix 6: Eliciting Media Identification

"How Deep is your Love?" *Elle*, December 2004

When you sign up to be with the one you love, it's easy to believe that your mantras of togetherness will ward off all those evil things that curse other people's relationships. It's you and me against the world, baby! Nothing's gonna stop us now! We all think like this. Because why would any of us spend so much time and energy looking for a long-term partner if we didn't really believe in the all-conquering power of two?

Right from the beginning, those mantras are tested. Call it fate or circumstance, but it transpires that his dress sense isn't all you hoped it might be after initially falling for him in his doctor's scrubs. Turns out that he hates the countryside and you dream of living there. He's allergic to dogs – aaargh! The tests come thick and fast.

Some will matter so little to you both that you barely notice them. Others – like the fact that he's married – will stop your relationship in its tracks. But really, at this stage it's Love on the nursery slopes. If the obstacles are too much and the relationship ends, no harm done; you probably haven't become too emotionally involved.

But the further your relationship progresses, the higher the stakes get. What happens when something huge gets in the path of true love? Do you backtrack when he loses his fortune? What if he loses his job or contracts a serious illness? When fate deals your partnership a card it wasn't prepared for, when 'for better' suddenly flips to 'for worse', do you stick or twist?

'I don't know if it was my worst nightmare,' says Nicola. 'I'm sure there are worse things. Actually, there are. Nine years later, I can say that but, at the time, it was "Woe is me".' Nicola, a 35-year-old fashion buyer, had been married to Dan, an art director, for a year when he broke his neck during a rugby game. 'When I was told, I thought: "That's it. You break your neck, you die",' she says.

Dan survived, but the prognosis was terrifying: he would be paralysed from the shoulders down for the rest of his life. Like Christopher Reeve, he would be able to breathe only with

the aid of a ventilator. For an adventurous, newlywed couple on the verge of emigrating to Hong Kong, where Dan had landed a job in an advertising agency, the news was barely imaginable.

'I'm pretty sure that, right away, I knew I was going to stay with Dan,' she says. 'I don't think I ever doubted I'd always be there for him, but that initial period after the accident was such a slow, slow process that I was living life minute by minute, literally. I kept saying to myself: "Whatever I feel, he's the one who's really suffering here, not me. I can walk out of here. I can decide what I want for lunch. He can't". But I don't think he really expected me to stick around. I knew that he wanted me to, but he'd never have put that pressure on me.'

Nine years on and Nicola and Dan are still together and have four-year-old twin daughters (conceived through IVF). Dan weaned himself off the ventilator and, although he's still paralysed, he's back working in advertising full-time. 'I'm not sure you can put into words how you survive something like this,' says Nicola. 'You change because you have to. It makes you tough, but in a good way. You think: "If I can deal with this, what else is ever going to worry me?" And apart from Dan being in a wheelchair, our life together is probably what I always thought it would be. Deep down, we're the same people.'

Compared to what Nicola and Dan went through, the trials facing other relationships seem like a walk in the park. But circumstances less devastating can still be very testing, even if they arise at the start of a relationship. Julia, 24, met Craig, 27, a property lawyer, last November. After spending time in the UK together, they decided to make it their home, so Craig returned to South Africa to sort out his affairs.

The day he came back, Craig was arrested at Heathrow Airport for possession of a forged visa. 'I wasn't allowed to speak to him until 24 hours later, by which time I'd gone through hell,' says Julia. 'I didn't know whether he'd been using me, trying to trick me or was who he said he was. Because I

couldn't speak to him, I just didn't know. But even then, the worst thing I thought could happen was that he'd be deported back to South Africa.' In fact, Craig was charged and is in Wormwood Scrubs awaiting trial and a possible nine to 12-month sentence.

Julia decided to stand by him. 'As soon as I saw him and we talked, my mind was made up. I looked into his eyes and I knew he was telling the truth. He's guilty of being completely stupid for getting his visa through a dodgy agent, but he just thought he was making a short cut. He's guilty of being naïve.'

Julia and Craig write to each other every day and she visits him in prison three times a week. 'It's really humiliating,' she says. 'I have to take my shoes and socks off, they look in my mouth, check my hair, take my fingerprints. Suddenly, I'm in this criminal world that I'm not used to.'

Whether Craig is found guilty or not, he will not be allowed to stay in the UK, so Julia is planning to move to South Africa to be with him. Her friends aren't sure she's doing the right thing. They say I haven't known him for long enough, but I know that nobody else has ever made me feel so good. We have no pretence with each other, there are no surprises – apart from the really massive one about the forged visa, of course!

To stay together, a couple need only decide that that's what they're going to do. They don't have to be nice to each other or enjoy it. You can stay together because your moral code won't let you leave or because you can't financially survive on your own. But to go through frightening changes and unexpected disaster and still like each other – to still have fun and get along – takes something more. But what?

'First, and most importantly, you need to have tolerance,' says clinical psychologist Linda Blair. 'You need to be someone who's able to withstand changes and see the good in that change, rather than fight against it. This is where the attitude, "If we can get through this, we can get through anything", becomes invaluable. Second, and almost as important, is respect. You have to love not what a person does, but who they are. Respect is about

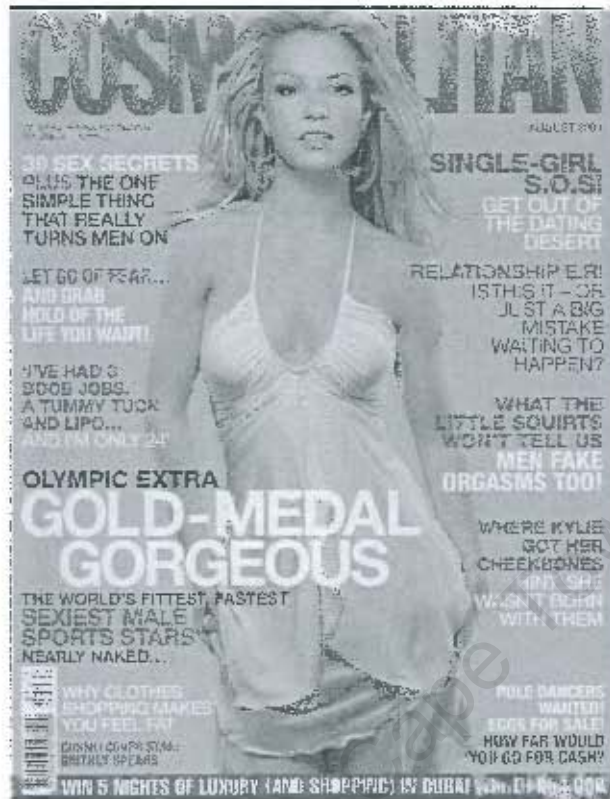
Appendix 7: Synchronous Magazine Covers

Elle, June 2004 and *Cosmopolitan*, June 2004

Both Magazines also featured the same back cover advert.



Appendix 7: Synchronous Magazine Covers
Cosmopolitan, August 2004 and *Marie Claire* August 2004



PRESS RELEASE

"Taste of the Art" POGGENPOHL Kitchen Studio Concept Reaches South African Shores

Cape Town, 30 November 2004

Alpine German Kitchens has opened the first South African concept studio for contemporary high-end kitchen brand Poggenpohl in De Waterkant, Cape Town. Any concept studio, no matter where in the world, has a defining look. Every detail exudes the brand's exact character and quality. With 200 such Poggenpohl studios across the globe, South Africans can now also indulge in master craftsmanship, luxury kitchens with state-of-the-art technology.

"Clients get a feel for the brand when entering the studio and then, through private consultation, create their own ideal tailored kitchen environment to suit their needs and preferences," says Wendy Grater, CEO of Alpine German Kitchens, sole importers of Poggenpohl to South Africa.

Poggenpohl provides a complete kitchen experience for people with the highest of standards. For 110 years, this pioneering brand has ensured that they keep ahead of consumers' changing needs and have remained the yardstick by which most premium kitchen design concepts are now measured. This is achieved by continually developing design detail and using innovative materials that can be integrated into any one of their individually designed kitchens.

Poggenpohl uses design elements such as the ergonomically engineered +MAXMORE® system that provides more depth and maximum storage space. Working space is optimally planned to ensure easy access so as to avoid placing the body under any unnecessary strain whilst cooking. This design element therefore ensures that heights of base and wall units are individually tailored to the user's body size.

Woods and metals are selected with extreme care – Poggenpohl uses an extended range of wooden fronts, including cherry wood, oak, maple and Swiss pear. Temperature and humidity differences that have a negative effect on wood and laminates are taken into careful consideration by ensuring that surfaces are resistant to high temperatures, water and steam.

Lightweight and non-corrosive aluminium is a material incorporated into the +ALU2000 Poggenpohl kitchen. Aluminium is known for its hygienic properties (bacteria is unable to grow on it) and its exceptional durability. Laminates undergo a high-pressure manufacture process that results in resilient materials with high impact resistance.

The kitchen now plays an altered role in the modern lifestyle, acting as an extended living area, incorporating a communication and entertainment hub into the traditional heart of the home. With this in mind, Poggenpohl accommodates entertainment systems in the kitchen that spill over into the living areas. "Lifestyles are changing and we spend more time socialising, entertaining and in the kitchen," says Wendy. "When it comes to quality, South Africans are becoming more discerning. People are now ready to invest more in this living space, in order to capitalise on an already world-class lifestyle," adds Wendy.

Poggenpohl embraces the innovative design spectrum, offering unlimited freedom for creativity. Every functional detail in a Poggenpohl kitchen is a solution in itself, incorporated in a perfect entity, blending into the home and lifestyle.

For a private consultation contact Alpine German Kitchens on: 021 532 2626 or visit for more information.

ENDS

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Tel: 021 462 3129

Appendix 9: Regurgitated PR Copy

"Concept of the clutter-free kitchen is to be launched in city" *Cape Times*, 24 September 2004

Concept of the clutter-free kitchen is to be launched in city

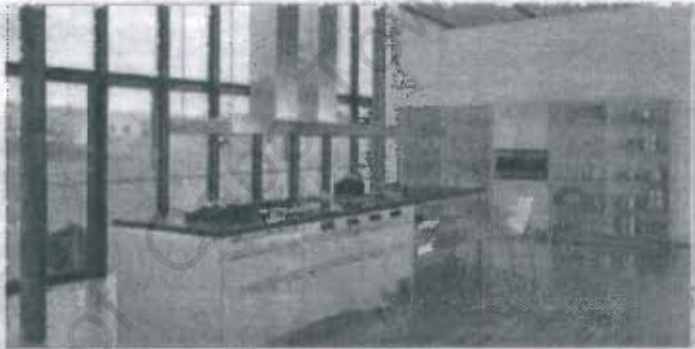
PROPERTY STAFF

KITCHENS play an altered role in modern lifestyles, acting as an extended living area, incorporating a communication and entertainment area into the traditional heart of the home.

In November, Alpine German Kitchens will launch the first South African concept studio for contemporary high-end kitchen brand, Poggenpohl, in De Waterkant, Cape Town, so homeowners can get a feel for the brand and create their own ideal tailored kitchen.

Alpine chief executive Wendy Grafer says Poggenpohl uses design elements such as an ergonomically engineered system that provides extra depth and maximum storage space. Working heights and wall units are tailored to the user, and working space is optimised to minimise unnecessary strain during food preparation.

"Clutter-free kitchens are becoming popular among many of our clients and many homeowners are opting out of the warm and cosy farmhouse-style kitchens with



NEW APPROACH: Artist's impression of the first South African concept studio for contemporary kitchen brand, Poggenpohl, to be launched in De Waterkant, Cape Town in November.

spices, pans and condiments on display, and moving towards minimalist set ups where the chaos of a dinner party can be kept well out of guests' view," Grafer says.

Modern kitchen designs incorporate clip-in containers or roller shutter appliance cupboards with integrated plug points, and some designers are putting stoves and fridges out of sight behind slick

fold-back cupboard doors.

"Space permitting, we often recommend the integration of a scullery space that incorporates most of the functional aspects of a kitchen out of sight, and leaves a display kitchen spotless. Materials like frosted glass are also popular, although minimalist kitchens can be made to order out of any materials," she says.

INSIDEOUT

Heart of modern household

Modern design trends place the kitchen at the heart of the home, and this previously purely functional space has become more of a communal area for informal socialising.
writes MICHELLE SWART

I FIGURES without saying that since kitchens have become the undisputed hub of the modern home, there is much more of an emphasis on the design and finishes used. There are a variety of kitchen designs from which homeowners can choose to complement their homes and suit their preferences and lifestyle.

An exciting development in this arena is the fact that Alpine German Kitchens has opened the first South African concept studio for contemporary high-end kitchen brand Poggenpohl in De Waterkant, Cape Town.

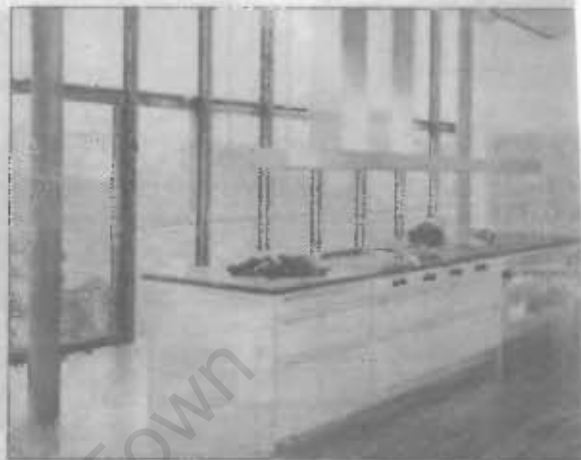
Any concept studio, no matter where in the world, has a defining look. Every detail exudes the brand's exact character and quality. With 200 such Poggenpohl studios across the globe, South Africans can now also indulge in master craftsmanship, luxury kitchens with state-of-the-art technology.

"Clients get a feel for the brand when entering the studio and then, through private consultation, create their own ideal tailored kitchen environment to suit their needs and preferences," says Wendy Grater, CEO of Alpine German Kitchens, sole importers of Poggenpohl to SA.

Poggenpohl provides a complete kitchen experience for people with the highest of standards. For 110 years, this pioneering brand has ensured that they keep ahead of consumers' changing needs, and have remained the yardstick by which most premium kitchen design concepts are now measured. This is achieved by continually developing design detail and using innovative materials that can be integrated into any one of their individually designed kitchens.

Poggenpohl uses design elements such as the ergonomically engineered +MAXMORE® system, which provides more depth and maximum storage space. Working space is optimally planned to ensure easy access so as to avoid placing the body under any unnecessary strain while cooking. This design element ensures heights of base and wall units are individually tailored to the user's body size.

Woods and metals are selected with extreme care. Poggenpohl uses an extended range of wooden fronts, including cherry wood, oak, maple and Swiss pear. Temperature and humidity differences that have a negative effect on wood and laminates are taken into



Lifestyles are changing and we spend more time socialising, entertaining and in the kitchen

careful consideration by ensuring that our resistant to high temperatures, water and:

Lightweight and non-corrosive aluminum material incorporated into the +ALU25001 Kitchen. Aluminum is known for its hygiene (bacteria is unable to grow on it) and its durability. Laminates undergo a high-pressure manufacturing process that results in resilient with high impact resistance.

The kitchen now plays an altered role in lifestyle, acting as an extended living area, a communication and entertainment hub in traditional heart of the home. With this in mind Poggenpohl accommodates entertainment the kitchen that spill over into the living area.

"Lifestyles are changing and we spend more socialising, entertaining and in the kitchen," Wendy. "When it comes to quality, South Africans are becoming more discerning. People are now invest more in this living space, in order to create an already world-class lifestyle," adds Wendy.

Poggenpohl embraces the innovative design spectrum, offering unlimited freedom for creativity.

Every functional detail in a Poggenpohl kitchen solution is itself, incorporated in a perfect way blending into the home and lifestyle.

Appendix 9: Regurgitated PR Copy

"Kitchen Studio Concept Reaches South African Shores" *Beautiful Kitchens and Appliances*, Spring 2004

"Taste of the Art" Poggenpohl

Kitchen Studio Concept Reaches South African shores

Alpine German Kitchens has announced that it will launch the first South African concept studio for contemporary high-end kitchen brand Poggenpohl in De Waterkant, Cape Town on November 25.

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Lightweight and non-corrosive aluminium is a material incorporated into the +ALU2000 Poggenpohl kitchen. Aluminium is known for its hygienic properties (bacteria is unable to grow on it) and its exceptional

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For a private consultation, contact Alpine German Kitchens on: 021 532 2626 or visit www.poggenpohl.com for more information



Appendix 9: Regurgitated PR Copy

"Taste of the Art' Poggenpohl Kitchen Studio Concept Reaches South African Shores" *Designing Ways*, November 2004

TRADE WINDS

"Taste of the Art"

POGGENPOHL Kitchen Studio Concept Reaches South African Shores

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