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## Stylizing the Self: The Y Generation in Rosebank, Johannesburg

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Global cities, like New York, San Salvador, or Shanghai, have served as critical sites for the remixing and reassembling of racial identities. This has taken specific and concrete form in Johannesburg, where, particularly after 1994, the city has become a site for new media cultures as a wide range of radio stations, television talk shows, and local soap operas went on air and magazines were founded. Postarchitectural spaces, like billboards, came to be used to insert products, like cell phones or AIDS campaigns, into youth culture itself. Darrel Bristow-Bovey writes of the city's skyline:

The first time I arrived in Johannesburg by car it was midnight and I was tired. As I skirted the city centre heading north, I looked into the night sky and saw Naomi Campbell. Oh my, she was big. She hovered above me, glowing as though lit from within, etched in the heavens 50m tall, like every fat girl's worst nightmare. . . . A Naomi stretched across one entire side of a twenty-storey building was my first introduction to Johannesburg's peculiar culture of outdoor advertising. . . . Billboards are an intrinsic weave in the fabric of the city, a vital feature of the cognitive mapping that has to take place in order to effectively navigate your way around a city of this size. Each major intersection, each significant route, is marked with a billboard.<sup>1</sup>

1. Darrel Bristow-Bovey, "Sign o' the Times," *SL*, October 1999, 100.

Much of what Bristow-Bovey writes about Johannesburg is also true of the main roads through Soweto, where one sees vast billboards dwarfing shacks and lower-middle-class dwellings. Such juxtaposition of media cultures and poverty marks the visual and material dimensions of Johannesburg, generally. This essay is about these urban visual forms, which embody concepts of the urban, of race, and of culture that have much to tell us about Johannesburg as it participates in global cultures of circulation. These visual cultures are the loci of a language of aspiration, a language that, as we will see, both speaks to and silences psychic and material “remainders” beyond the text: crime, economic hardship, and bodily frailties, even death itself, in the wake of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

In discussing urban visual cultures, I pay close attention to modes of stylizing the self increasingly common among young people in the city. By *stylization of the self*, I am referring to how people seek to transform themselves into singular beings, to make their lives into an oeuvre that carries with it certain stylistic criteria. I am also referring to the emergence of explicit forms of selfhood within the public domain and the rise of the first-person singular within the work of liberation. My focus on self-styling avoids easy equations between the young, post-apartheid generation in Johannesburg and a global youth culture. Generation Y cannot be reduced to mere surface(s), nor is it simply a subcultural critique of “official culture.” We also need to reformulate the way the local and global intersect in South Africa to understand the innovative, often still unchartered borderlands in which youth cultures give voice to imaginative worlds very different from those of the parental generation.<sup>2</sup>

The generation I discuss in this essay includes those who have attended racially mixed (model C) schools in the city as well as many who attended exclusively black township schools. I focus specifically on the emergence of a new city youth culture, called *Y*, *loxion culture*, or *loxion kulcha*, centered in Rosebank, Johannesburg, but stretching well beyond this trendy, affluent, and increasingly racially mixed suburb. I show how young people remake the past in very specific ways in the services of the present and the future and how they develop a mode of cultural accessorization in the making of their contemporary selfhood. I argue that accessorization should be understood neither as a Foucauldian biopolitics nor as an epidermal or nanopolitics, in the sense developed by Paul Gilroy.<sup>3</sup> Rather, it is

2. See Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, “Millennial Capitalism: First Thoughts on a Second Coming,” in *Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism*, ed. Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001).

3. Paul Gilroy, *Between Camps: Nations, Cultures and the Allure of Race* (London: Penguin, 2000).

a practice that represents the new edge of a youth movement that cuts across sonic, sartorial, visual, and textual cultures to produce a dense interconnectivity among them. This accessorization of identity, including racial identity, through compositional remixing both occupies and delimits zones of translatability. It is decreasingly attached to the transfer of meaning per se but rather inhabits a matrix of transfiguration.<sup>4</sup>

Y is a living letter, the live-wire sign of the times in a city now widely known by young hip South Africans as “Jozi.” It stands for *youth* but also for *why?* It inscribes itself against, kicks loose from X (the name given to the generation that fought in the antiapartheid struggle and subsequently had difficulty finding a place in South African society). It is also the name of a magazine that speaks to and for this generation. On the magazine’s spine is its tagline: “Y—BECAUSE YOU WANT TO KNOW.” The magazine is owned by a company called YIRED, a name that plays on notions of being “wired” and (well) connected that are frequently foregrounded in the magazine’s contents.

Y culture’s embryonic incarnation was YFM, South Africa’s largest regional radio station, beamed from Johannesburg, which now boasts more than half a million listeners. The station was set up in 1996 to broadcast popular, especially local, music to black youth, and it is now the arbiter of South African cool. YFM launched *kwaito*, South Africa’s first globally recognized local music form, a potent blend of city and township sound that emerged after the democratic transition in 1994, mixing the protest dancing and chanting known as *toyi toyi* with slow-motion house, local pop (“bubblegum”), and a dash of hip-hop. *Y* magazine, started in 1998, built on the Y brand and closely associated itself with both YFM and *kwaito*. In 2002, a fashion label called Loxion Kulcha was launched, signifying—as the phrase does—a remixing of “location” (township) culture in the heart of the city itself. Loxion Kulcha is described as a “pride-driven line,” a “brand born of the Yfm era,” one that remixes African American styles to its own purposes and in ways that speak to its own cultural precursors.<sup>5</sup> Its designers, Wandi Nzimande and Sechaba “Chabi” Mogale, are “typical generation Yers, children of the 1980s who are old enough to understand what the political fuss [of the apartheid era] was about, yet young enough to keep an open mind [to the present and the future].”<sup>6</sup>

4. Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar and Elizabeth A. Povinelli, “Technologies of Public Forms: Circulation, Transfiguration, Recognition,” *Public Culture* 15 (2003): 385–97.

5. Bulelwa Mtsali, “Street Couture,” *Y*, May 2000, 61.

6. Mtsali, “Street Couture,” 62.



Y culture is located most visibly in an area called the Zone in Rosebank, which houses the YFM studios as well as the Y-Shoppe and related labels like Stoned Cherrie. Rosebank is a suburb cum business district where sectors like information technology, retail, fashion, cinema, restaurants, and travel and tourism have been attracting a trendy and youthful workforce since the late 1980s. Increasingly, to serve this young workforce, a process of infill has occurred, in which shopping complexes expand by incorporating spaces and structures that predated them. The Zone is one of these infills, where enclosed shopping areas and open spaces are linked by indoor and outdoor “roads” that, as Tanya Farber suggests, turn the notion of public space inside out.<sup>7</sup>

The Zone’s yellow and blue neon tubes, glitter tiles, reflective aluminum cladding on its columns, and exposed steel trusses all contribute to its particular industrial aesthetic, which combines the club and the factory. The Zone suppresses the threshold between public and private, pavement and mall, inside and out; the fluidity of its spaces—one is already on the escalator before one realizes it—makes it innovative in a design sense. The Zone’s indoor roads sometimes feel like catwalks, the television screens that hang over the walkways are reminiscent of modern gyms, and its surfaces (reflective, shiny) and their colors (an energetic metallic gray flecked with primary colors) differentiate it from the neutral beige of other shopping centers.<sup>8</sup> In general, the Zone maximizes the intersections of gazes: people on the escalators produce a spectacle for diners at an adjacent restaurant. The main indoor roads in the Zone function as promenades, and signs appear on shop fronts that would once have been appropriate as outdoor signs.<sup>9</sup> As a privatized public space, the Zone both speaks of exclusion—though it is possible for poorer citizens to come to the Zone, they are not welcome—and represents one of Johannesburg’s relatively few upmarket open spaces, where theater, mime, and dance groups perform, parades are organized, and people come from all over the continent to trade in a large African market. The Zone and its surroundings constitute a space that does not yet display the nihilism of consumer culture in the United States, in which each customer is pegged to a specifically managed and increasingly reified identity. This may be due to the still recent emergence of the black body from its history under apartheid, which this culture seeks in part to remember but largely to transform, and to the relative flu-

7. Tanya Farber, “Loaded with Labels: The Meanings of Clothing amongst Urban Black Youth in Rosebank, Johannesburg” (MA thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 2002), 73.

8. I am grateful to Lindsay Bremner for her discussions with me on this point.

9. Farber, “Loaded with Labels,” 87.

idity with which black middle-class culture locates itself in the city after a long period of exclusion.

The Zone is one of the most visible places in South Africa for experimentation with new media cultures and with various practices of stylizing the self. These practices speak for a new generation of South Africans who have the means to shift the culture at large and of reassembling the past, the present, and the future—in the process creating a specific urban culture that has emerged as one of the most decisive cultural shifts in the postapartheid era.

### Remix

Y is a hybrid culture that appeals to young people across the intracultural borders of class, education, and taste. More specifically, it is constituted through a “re-mixing” of the township and the city, of the township *in* the city. Wandí and Chabi, who launched the Loxion Kulcha label, reflect this intraculture: while Wandí is the *kasi* (township boy), Chabi is the *Bana ba di Model C* (Model C kid).<sup>10</sup> Their designs incorporate explicit cultural knowledge of where “township culture” is heading. Loxion Kulcha does not reflect a fundamentally “township look”; rather the point of cultural reference lies, as Mpolokeng Bogatsu points out, in the brand name itself.<sup>11</sup> It is this explicit branding that is invested in operations of remixing. Although loxion culture’s market is intraclass, sartorial markings are often seen to reveal sharp distinctions between Zone and township kids. As young people interviewed in the Zone observed, “Township girls wear Rocabarocco shoes that are square-shaped with laces. . . . They will wear bright jeans with a collar-type shirt. A Zone kid will wear jeans and a nice top.” Another glosses this as, “They dress similarly, but you can tell them apart. Model C girls have an air of sophistication, whereas township girls could snap anytime.” A third interviewee added: “In our generation, we all kind of dress the same. Some blacks

10. A “township boy” would usually (as in this case) be somebody who grew up in a “black” township, the latter often associated with poverty, crime, overcrowding, and lack of resources (although the term has now acquired so many connotations that it can stand alone to imply a certain way of life; see Achille Mbembe, Nsizwa Dlamini, and Grace Khunou, “Soweto Now,” in this issue). The term *Model C kid* plays off the fact that when South African schools were first integrated, privileged schools in white suburbs that opened their doors to black students were classified as “Model C” schools (though the term is no longer used in this sense). Over time, “Model C” has come to refer to black students who have taken on the styles of their white classmates.

11. Mpolokeng Bogatsu, “‘Loxion Kulcha’: Cultural Hybridism and Appropriation in Contemporary Black Youth Popular Culture (South Africa)” (Honors research paper, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 2003).

dress outrageously wrong and some whites do too, but we all wear the same things. If you check around, you can't notice a difference between whites and blacks here, apart from the colour of their skin."<sup>12</sup> Difference is still located on the skin, as color, even as skin color becomes less determined within this sartorially inflected set of practices and signs.

The above quotations clearly show that the racial identities that emerge from Y or loxion kulcha are new in relation to the apartheid legal classification of people as white, black, Indian, or Coloured. These categories operated on an everyday basis through processes of urbanization, policing, and the manipulation of cultural difference for political ends. Since 1994, when this system was abolished, young people have occupied these identities in changing ways, living as they now do in a "postracist" society. Nadine Dolby argues that "taste" is displacing orthodox versions of race and culture as the carrier of social distinctions—this as popular culture replaces the church, family, and neighborhood as the primary site where racial identities are forged.<sup>13</sup> The criteria that define bodies, clothing, and culture as "white," "Coloured," or "black" are not constant but shifting, as fashion and music tastes, as well as "it" city sites, metamorphose. Class dynamics work into the constitution of racialized taste patterns, as music and clothing take on charged race and class connotations. What is clear is that new youth cultures are superseding the resistance politics of an earlier generation, while still jamming, remixing, and remaking cultural codes and signifiers from the past.

Stoned Cherrie, one of the most popular fashion labels at the Zone, reuses images of boxing champions, beauty queens, and musicians from *Drum*, a magazine for blacks popular during the 1950s, integrating them into contemporary fashion styles. *Drum* was associated with places like Sophiatown, the heart of Johannesburg's counterculture in the 1950s. It projected an expressly cosmopolitan target audience ("the new African cut adrift from the tribal reserve—urbanized, eager, fast-talking and brash").<sup>14</sup> Stoned Cherrie's designs speak in several registers: in part they play on the taste for "retro" (a current global trend in styling) by drawing on imagery from the past, parody images of the 1950s as they

12. Farber, "Loaded with Labels," 11–16.

13. Nadine Dolby, *Constructing Race* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000).

14. Lewis Nkosi, *Home and Exile and Other Selections* (London: Longman, 1983), 8. Rob Nixon quotes an unnamed African man in conversation with the incoming editor of *Drum* in Johannesburg in 1951: "Ag, why do you dish out that's tuff man? . . . Tribal music! Tribal history! Chiefs! We don't care about chiefs! Give us jazz and film stars, man! We want Duke Ellington, Satchmo, and hot dames! Yes, brother, anything American." *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood: South African Culture and the World Beyond* (London: Routledge, 1994), 11.

brand images onto T-shirts, and invoke a nostalgia for the “location.” The bad boys of the 1950s, *pantsulas*, migrant and blue-collar laborers, and the black cover-girl phenomenon are all re-created in Loxion Kulcha. In an analysis of how Loxion Kulcha remakes township culture and more specifically blends *pantsula* style and African American street cultures, Nthabiseng Motsemme shows that *isishoeshoe* and *iduku* (shoes and headcloths worn by married women who were domestic servants or rural women working in the city) have been recaptured, reinterpreted, and transformed into iconic fashion items on display in Rosebank.<sup>15</sup> In a recent line of low-cut, tight-fitting T-shirts, Steve Biko’s image and name appear in a brilliant, stylized red: it is less that the black consciousness message is being commemorated here than that a sartorial style is being marked as in-your-face contemporary through the remixing and recoding of an icon.

Loxion Kulcha began with a collection of hand-knitted beanies (hats) that then grew into urban street-wear, mainly denims, printed T-shirts, and sports shoes. Recent designs include branded overalls and LK (Loxion Kulcha) men’s suits. While township culture and identity have existed as long as the townships themselves, it is the *performance* of township culture that has emerged with new vigor in the contemporary context: “Like kwaito music, Loxion Kulcha claims the streets of South Africa’s townships as its cultural womb but occupies the centre of the city with its new forms.”<sup>16</sup> Township culture is translated from a socioeconomically stagnant culture into a high-urban experience. The latter gives rise to what is increasingly known as “Afro-chic.” In the 2000–2002 Loxion Kulcha collections, overalls were in primary colors, inspired by the work clothes of migrant laborers and miners. The designs of the overalls are similar to the *mdantsane*, the two-piece overalls consisting of pants and a zip-up jacket generally worn by factory workers on an assembly line. The LK design improvises on the mineworkers’ protective garment, however, by using bright colors to appropriate the utility-oriented, mass-produced overall for new cultural ends. The designs signal urban mobility; an insistence on staying in the township, Bogatsu notes, is increasingly marked within this culture as a self-defeating show of “negritude.”<sup>17</sup> The overalls also suture together two economic imaginaries: the history of work and of labor is less forgotten than tied to a service economy, in which the young workforce that labors as waiters and shop attendants in the Zone has become both providers

15. Nthabiseng Motsemme, “YFreedom—Nthabiseng Motsemme on Blackness in Post-Apartheid South Africa,” *WISER in Brief, Newsletter of the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research* 1, no. 2 (2002).

16. Bogatsu, “Loxion Kulcha,” 14.

17. Bogatsu, “Loxion Kulcha,” 21.

for wide family networks and consumers who buy clothes and music in the area and hang out in Rosebank's clubs when they are off duty.

### A Stylistics of Sensation

Turning to a series of images from *Y* magazine, we can see how *Y* culture signals to, but increasingly breaks with, the past in its adoption of a newly elaborated stylistics of sensation and singularization. Hair and clothing are crucial vectors of this stylistics. A cover image accompanied by the words "kwaito-nation" reveals a striking example of the foregrounding of the capacity for sensation, of the new investment in the body's special presence and powers, and of the ascendancy of the sign of blackness. Here, selfhood and subjectivity can no longer be interpreted as merely inscriptions of broader institutional and political forces; rather, the images project an increased self-consciousness of the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process. Representations of the self as an expressive subject have for some time been seen to signal a subject that is fractured, multiple, shifting, and produced through performativity.<sup>18</sup> Beyond this, however, processes of individuation and subjectivation, such as those discussed above, can be seen as self-transformative practices based on specific aesthetic values and stylistic criteria and enabled by various techniques and technologies through which individuals conform to rules of conduct.<sup>19</sup>

The *Y* magazine cover image bears further analysis. All sixteen *kwaito* artists are black, and all are dressed in black, with one or two white shirts showing underneath. The emphasis is on the glamour and style of blackness, reflected metonymically in the color of the clothes themselves. In a fashion sequence six months later called "Angel Delight" (fig. 2), in which "Ymag salutes the dance, the primal human ritual signifying love, life, lust, death, celebration," the theme is the color white, and the shoot is dominated this time by women but also by a cross-racial group: white and Coloured women are foregrounded, and cross-racial and cross-gendered sexual desire is clearly being played with in the image.<sup>20</sup> Here, then, is a quite different version of *Y* magazine's projected reader, and this difference is part of a broader remixing and rematching of identity, including racial identity, in an ever-shifting signifying chain.

18. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993) and *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

19. Michel Foucault, *Hermeneutique du sujet* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001).

20. *Y*, October–November 2002.



The identities that emerge in the images above are compositional identities. The self in this instance is above all a work of art. The stylizations of the self that are projected in the magazine's images are based on a delicate balance between actual emerging lifestyles of middle-class black youth and the politics of aspiration. A letter to the editor in the June–July 2002 issue explicitly acknowledges this: “After reading Y-mag for a while now I’ve concluded that it would appeal more to the ‘miss-thangs’ and ‘brother mans’ living or trying to live the so-called hip life in Jozi. Some of us live in different areas in the country and you only portray a certain kind of youth. The rest of us then feel like the odd ones out, making us feel like aliens or something. Please broaden your scope so that most people can find it appealing, not just those who live in Jozi.” The editors’ reply follows: “We are all aliens if you think about it, depending where you come from. But seriously, though, Y-mag is for you. Y-mag doesn’t necessarily portray reality as each of us would see it, that is, we’re aspiring as well. We obviously can’t reflect every kind of person under the good sun but every young person can and will find at least one thing they like inside Y-mag.”<sup>21</sup>

In acknowledging that their product is made for those who aspire to hip, cutting-edge, middle-class lifestyles in the city, the editors acknowledge a potential “gap,” a gap of potential, between what is and what could be. The present and the possible interlace to form a stylistics of the future. We could also draw out this idea of a gap from the words of one young South African whom Farber interviewed in the Zone: “We understand where we come from, but I am not interested in politics and about what happened in the ’80s because I wasn’t there. And even if I was, I live for the future.”<sup>22</sup> Since this interviewee is in his early twenties, he was in fact “there” in the 1980s, during the worst of the apartheid struggle and the height of the resistance to it. Indirectly acknowledging this by his phrase “and even if I was,” he nevertheless insists on the fact that his project and investment lie in a search for the future. His words, we could say, mark him as a public representative of “the now” in South Africa, as he signals the remainders of the past but also speaks the future-oriented language of aspiration.

Y magazine, in naming a subject who aspires, also draws consumers into a competitive system in which not everyone can have what he or she aspires to. Tim Burke, one of the few theorists of African consumer culture, asks in *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women* (1996) whether the body is a uniquely powerful site in the process of stylizing the self. Conceding that the pleasures of consumption in the

21. Y, June–July 2002, 12.

22. Farber, “Loaded with Labels,” 28.

twentieth century became increasingly and explicitly tied to the satisfaction of the body and its needs, he argues that if we pursue the history of “the body” too avidly, “we risk separating individuals from their bodies, seeing, for example, the bodies of women as separate from the selves of women.”<sup>23</sup> Burke is concerned with the gap between the body and the self that a culture of commodification would seem to imply.

Yet the making of the contemporary self is not so easily readable in the self-representations and subjective practices, the powerful parodic languages, the processes of self-styling in which the body plays such an important part, and the seductive surface forms of this youth culture. Perhaps it is precisely these surfaces that ought to be taken more seriously as analytic constructs—contrary to Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff’s rejection of the surface as an insufficient analytic space in their work on millennial capitalism.<sup>24</sup> It may well be here, on the surfaces of youth culture, that we come to encounter the enigmatic and divergent ways of knowing and self-making that mark its forms. However, pursuing the surfaces of cultural form implies a reading that positions itself at the limit of the notions of translatability. It is to this powerful trope that I now turn.

### Translatability

One mode of analysis that suggests itself in relation to *Y* culture is translatability.<sup>25</sup> The cover stories of *Y* magazine, for instance, signal a transnational, multilingual hybridity: “Skwatta Kamp: Hard to the Core Hip-Hop” suggests the influence of American hip-hop on the local scene (Skwatta Kamp is a local rap group), even as it invokes the local topography of the squatter camp—the ubiquitous sign of homelessness and poverty in urban South Africa.<sup>26</sup> “Vat en Sit: Shacking Up in Y2K” explores how young black South African couples flout older orthodoxies of sex and marriage, drawing on the Afrikaans words *vat* and *sit* and the English word *shack* (used to denote the makeshift quarters of the poorest of South Africa’s townships and squatter camps).<sup>27</sup> “The Colour of Music: Whites and

23. Timothy Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption and Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996), 12.

24. Comaroff and Comaroff, “Millennial Capitalism.”

25. For an interesting discussion of translatability see Emily Apter, “On Translation in a Global Market,” *Public Culture* 13 (2001): 1–12.

26. *Y*, August–September 2002.

27. *Y*, June 2000. *Vat en sit* (take and live with) is a colloquial Afrikaans expression first used by migrant workers who would meet and live with women in the city despite having a wife in the rural area or town they came from—a practice that both women involved were often aware of.

Kwaito” signals an interest in and a projection of crossover cultural and racial cultural codes in postapartheid South Africa, as does “Darkies and Ecstasy: Is it the New Zol?”<sup>28</sup>

Translatability and multilingualism are built into the text of *Y* magazine, though most of the main text is written in English. It is in the interstices—the soundbites, the gossip pages, the reviews—that language emerges as a translation practice. Acronyms, wordplay, colloquialisms, and “deep” meanings are some of the devices drawn on within a culture of translatability. A review of a new CD release by local *kwaito* act Bongo Maffin reads, in Zulu, “Aahyh, Ngi yai bon’indlela en’ibalwe BM” [Ah, I see the road and it says BM (Bongo Maffin)].<sup>29</sup> The phrasing also undoubtedly plays on the widely admired style and road performance of BMWs. The album reviewed contains a remix of a Dorothy Masuka classic “Imphi indlela” (“Where’s the road / the way”), and here the reviewer plays on these words to show how much he recommends the album (“the road says Bongo Maffin”). The same text then shifts from Zulu to Tswana: “Kego tsaela 99, Bongo Maffin ifhlile” [I’m telling you straight up, Bongo Maffin has arrived].<sup>30</sup>

These modes of translatability question standard notions of location and publics. They show us that the “world” appears increasingly as a set of fragments, bits, and pieces with which young people grapple. Sutured onto these bits and pieces are the histories of isolation from and connection to the world that South Africans carry.<sup>31</sup> These fragments come to be refracted in ways that produce not so much mimeries as resemblances between signs—what Achille Mbembe has referred to as “the powers of the false.”<sup>32</sup> As these meanings travel they also encounter resistant edges, and in *Y* culture one of these edges is the sign of black America. As *Y* youth come to inhabit a culture of selfhood shaped in part by

28. *Y*, June–July 2000; *Y*, February 2000.

29. Nappy Head, “Into Yam, Bongo Maffin,” *Y*, October–November 1998.

30. By alternating between English and the Zulu/Xhosa/Swati sector (which can be grouped as a unit due to linguistic similarities), *Y* magazine would be less likely to appeal to the Sotho/Tswana/Pedi group of black youth (the Shangaan/Venda sector tends to be left out). “99” (pronounced “nine, nine”) is a popular township phrase meaning *straight up*, *bluntly*, or *simply*—depending on the tone and context. The colloquial term is used side by side with “deep” Setswana. The review writer is likely to be a Motswana but, like most black South Africans, familiar with many vernaculars.

31. The way postapartheid South African youth engage with the world has been shaped by often violent histories of international connection (through migration from elsewhere in Africa and the diffusion of British and American culture) and by the fact of apartheid South Africa’s international isolation (as the grotesque in the colonial historical narrative and the international sanctions and boycotts that cut it off from the rest of the African continent).

32. Achille Mbembe, “On the Power of the False,” *Public Culture* 14 (2002): 629–41.

African American hip-hop culture, they also rebel against it, resulting in a form of pastiche. A cut-and-paste appropriation of American music, language, and cultural practices is simultaneously deployed and refuted. An example of this can be found in the self-styling of Trompies, a *kwaito* group that epitomizes the contemporary version of *mapantsula*. The group is now sponsored by FUBU (For Us By Us), an African American clothing label often worn by American rap artists. In the June–July 2000 issue of *Y* magazine, Trompies is accused of making a “fashion faux pas,” since they call themselves *pantsulas* yet adopt a hip-hop style.<sup>33</sup> Yet it is also acknowledged that the 1950s *pantsula* culture emanated from America.<sup>34</sup> Although the black American is embraced as a “brother,” the *Y* reader does not want to be assimilated into his culture.<sup>35</sup>

In the April–May 2000 issue, the editor writes: “Our relationship with black Americans is only by virtue of us all being African descendants. The reality is that their true ancestors, the slaves that crossed the ocean in the dungeons of those ships, were taken from the West Coast of the continent. We aren’t preaching any anti-African-American theories. As much as we appreciate the music, there really is no need to patronise us.”<sup>36</sup> A review of the video of the film *Beloved* advises: “Don’t be put off by the thought that it’s ‘about slavery’ because slavery takes many forms in *Beloved*, as does redemption.”<sup>37</sup> A tongue-in-cheek, parodic language frames a youth cultural stance invested in resisting master narratives of “who we are,” whether these come from veterans of the South African struggle or from black America. However, when Goodenough Mashego wrote, “I believe that the younger generation of people of colour needs to reclaim the kaffir name. We, the *kwaito*–hip hop generation must let go of the imported nigga-nigga identity and blast off as kaffirs,” the article carried a boldface disclaimer from the editorial staff: “The opinions expressed on this page are not necessarily those of the edi-

33. Bulelwa Mstali, Thami Masemola, and Tshepang Gule, “Manga Manga,” *Y*, June–July 2000, 19.

34. Thami Masemola, “Dlala Mapantsula,” *Y*, June–July 2000, 47.

35. The choice of the *Boondocks* comic strip by Aaron McGruder, an irregular but consistent feature in the 1999–2000 issues of *Y* magazine, over the locally produced *Madam and Eve* can be read as less an Americanization of *Y* image and identity than an appeal to a particular age and persona (including humor and language) that the *Y* reader can relate to. Whereas *Madam and Eve* parodies relationships between white women and their domestic servants in the suburbs, *Boondocks* deal with issues like hair politics (“Afro-denial”) and the underrepresentation of blacks in television and film (“We’re fighting the Hollywood white-out!”; “Storm from the *X-Men* is supposed to be black right? . . . I’m going to create a black superhero team with a token white woman and give her a big ol’ nappy ‘fro—see how they like it!”). *Y*, August 2000, 52.

36. Bulelwa Mtsali, Thami Masemola, and Tshepang Gule, “War of the Worlds,” *Y*, April–May 2000, 10.

37. Nol’thando Buhendwa, review of *Beloved*, by Toni Morrison, *Y*, October 1999, 88.

tors and publishers of *Y* magazine.”<sup>38</sup> This unusual qualification suggests the rawness, still, of the insult contained in the term *kaffir* and the contentiousness perhaps of reclaiming it so soon. Black South Africans turn to the apartheid struggle, rather than to slavery, as a source of identity. *Y* magazine’s response to African American culture tends to shape, as well as reflect, attitudes expressed in the culture at large. Recently, the well-known *kwaito* artist Zola commented on the rapper Ja Rule’s visit to South Africa, “They’re just well-paid slaves with very expensive platinum chains. But they’re still locked in them and they don’t see. If they can’t even free their minds in Africa? They’ll always be slaves. . . . Jo’burg is now a place of pride, a place of history, a place of liberation, it’s a place of African wealth, technology, education and culture.”<sup>39</sup>

The scapes of the social revealed in *Y* magazine, their bits and pieces, can also tell us a great deal about the workings of racial identity and its textually convened publics. *Y* was conceived by the YIRED publishers as a counterpart to *SL* magazine, which targets largely white but also crossover youth audiences.<sup>40</sup> The intention was to overcome the dominant industry model, in which youth magazines targeted limited “readership ghettos” in order to attract specialized advertising. The relationship between the two titles was initially conceived as a move toward establishing the first multiracial youth-oriented product to succeed in South Africa. While the two magazines would remain separate titles, the link was made obvious in their taglines: *SL*’s line is “*SL*—EVERYTHING YOU KNOW IS WRONG,” and *Y*’s, as we have seen, is “*Y*—BECAUSE YOU WANT TO KNOW.” Analysis of these taglines is revealing: while *SL* expresses the existential uncertainty of young white people whose security has been compromised by history, *Y*’s line captures the confidence of a free black youth. YIRED’s aspiration was to have “an intelligent and interactive relationship between two effectively competing titles that feed off each other.”<sup>41</sup>

In *SL*, the body appears less powerfully as a site of self-making—or at least it is inscribed in sharply different registers. Here, the body as sartorial site becomes

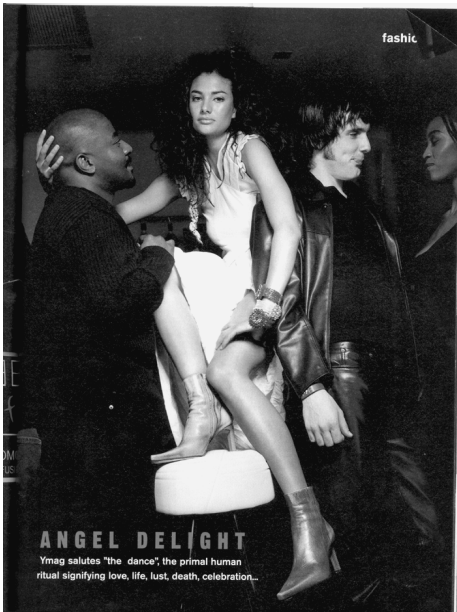
38. Goodenough Mashego, “You Can Call Me Kaffir,” *Y*, April 2000, 21.

39. Patrick Neate, “South Africa: The New Face of Kulcha,” *The Face*, October 2003, 56–74. The context for this rather telling outburst against Ja Rule includes both his on- and off-stage antics: his insistence, after a show, that all local performers be chased out of the backstage area; his minders smashing a Durban DJ’s vinyl after he played a song by Ja Rule’s rival 50 Cent; his drinking and spraying of expensive beer onstage; and his response to a local journalist who asked him at a Johannesburg press conference if she could take him to Soweto to show him a part of the city other than his five-star hotel: “I’m cool coming with you. Where’s that at? Is it a club?”

40. *SL* originally stood for “student life”; the magazine is now known simply as *SL*.

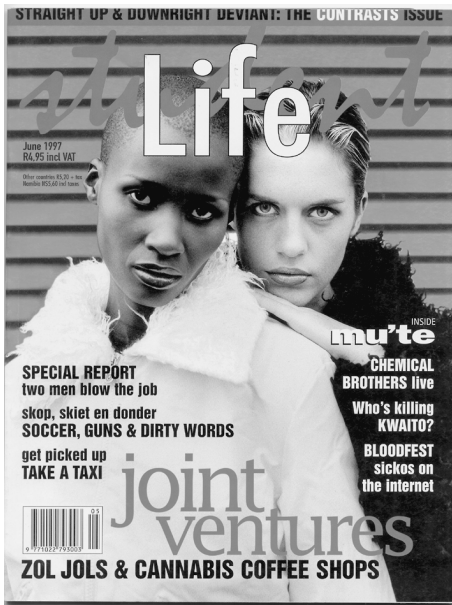
41. John Owen, “Y Boosts Youth Magazine Market,” 1998, [www.yfm.co.za](http://www.yfm.co.za).





the sign of the socially scandalous, but in ways that differ from the particular forms of excess and glamour we saw in *Y* magazine. The scandalous and its excess here have to do with sex (as in *Y*) but also general misbehavior: clubbing and rave culture, irreverence, social deviance, mockery of law-abiding citizens, and especially drug use (fig. 3). Together, these describe a hedonism that is used to challenge the norms of a society the magazine's projected public regards as false.

The *SL* reader does not see social responsibility as uncool, though being politically correct is treated scornfully. The magazine features "Vote ANC" advertisements but also uses racially derogatory slang terms as if to alarm the upright citizens who are the butt of its jokes. Politically correct culture itself seems to be read by *SL* as the truest site of racial tension. Thus, its references to "munts" and "darkies" are not seen as unacceptable but understood within the specific terms of this reading community. Likewise, *Y* magazine is not averse to referring to "whiteys" or "coconuts." About 20 percent of *SL*'s content is devoted to what could be described as "black music and entertainment" genres: local *kwaito* and pop music, as well as African American hip-hop, is reviewed alongside "white" alternative and rock music. *Y* magazine only sporadically features white music genres.<sup>42</sup> In the *SL* world, Alanis Morissette is out ("Morissette is the product of too many self-help manu-



42. However, in *Y*, the white equivalent of the "coconut" is regarded as an honorary member of black cool. Musicians like Lekgoa, DJs like The Admiral and Cristos, and other "in" white youth public figures are often featured in and contribute to the magazine's content. Bogatsu remarks: "It is interesting to note that the attitude to these 'cool whites' has moved beyond regarding them as a freak of nature. Although it is understood that they veer from expected social/racial norms, they have been culturally absorbed into the *Y*(outh) sub-culture. The article 'The Colour of Music: Whiteys and Kwaito' (June 2000) suggests that this phenomenon is worthy of remark. The article not only explores the notion of whites in a dominantly black music genre but also serves to 'give props' (show respect for) these 'cool whiteys.'" Bogatsu, "Loxion Kulcha," 10.

Figures 2 and 3

als and not enough brain cells”) and Brenda Fassie is in (“The major dudette is still rolling on. Forget rumour mills, scandalmongers, drug deals and hazy sexuality. And above all, forget the singalong princesses of kwaito. The real thing is back with a lazy, rhythmic album of easy rolling songs. If music has a soul, then Brenda is its psychosis”).<sup>43</sup>

As in *Y* magazine, irony and parody are dominant rhetorical modes in *SL*, especially when it comes to mocking mainstream forms of whiteness, revolution, puberty, and marriage. The restaurant reviews make particular use of these registers. Food—and drugs—are major preoccupations of the *SL* reader-consumer. For *Y* magazine, on the other hand, clothing and cars serve as much more important registers of middle-class youth style. *SL* attempts to rewrite South African histories of whiteness itself within the canons of popular culture and its preferred genres. For example, the criminal elements of apartheid’s power structure are reinserted into an “underworld” narrative of unlawfulness and deviance that intersects with *SL*’s own predispositions. Ferdi Barnard, the notorious apartheid paramilitary hit man, is described as “the archetypal white trash gangster: a thug and a hired assassin of steroid proportions.”<sup>44</sup> Barnard is figured as South Africa’s own “white trash,” a conspirator and a criminal whom “we love to hate.”<sup>45</sup>

43. David Sorfa, “Brenda Fassie, Memeza,” *SL*, February 1999, 95.

44. Charl Blignaut, “Jacques the Ripper,” *SL*, July 2001, 34.

45. All issues of *SL* magazine are themed; the “conspiracy” issue is a particularly good example of this. The introduction to one article describes its author, Jacques Pauw, as “the journalist who screwed the apartheid whore, talks to Charl Blignaut about death squads, fear and the future.” Ferdi Barnard is profiled in the following terms:

Of the entire dodgy cast of apartheid’s death squad operatives . . . Barnard is the exception. Eugene de Kock, Dirk Coetsee, Joe Mamasela, Arnold Nofomela and Craig Williamson did it for volk en vaderland. They were what happened when normal, diligent apartheid cops get given too much power. But Barnard was a career criminal. The kind of help you hire when someone is muscling in on your coke turf. He’d blow up the odd car and fire a couple of rounds over the garden fence before heading back to his brothel to unwind with a dozen crack cocaine rocks and a bottle-blond prostitute.

In particular, it is Barnard’s crack dealing that distinguishes him from the other apartheid assassins. Drug worlds, as we have seen, are a major preoccupation and style (or antistyle) feature of the *SL* universe. One article, for example, carries a “dos and don’ts” column:

**General:** never share needles; mixing drugs increases the risk factor; know your limits when it comes to quantity; beware of what you’re buying and from whom; maintain a balanced diet; take vitamin supplements; get enough sleep.

**Heroin:** be careful of overdosing—mixing heroin with other drugs increases this risk.

**Cocaine:** resist the impulse to use more; it’s extremely addictive (and expensive).

Blignaut, “Jacques the Ripper,” 34.

And so on.

*Y* and *SL* speak of a still emerging crossover culture that often retains racially distinctive modes of self-styling, at least at the level of content. *Y* magazine, in particular, focuses on crossover language styles as important to a process of cultural translatability, while in *SL*, crossover configurations are more apparent in terms of entertainment and advertising. Yet it is not enough to read the images and languages that these magazines convey within a meaning-centered account of translation. There are other processes happening at the level of cultural form, acts of transfiguration that return us to the question of circulation and its relationship to the theorization of texts.

### The Surfaces of Form

Both *Y* and *SL* magazines have large review sections that cover a wide range of cultural forms. Books, CDs, comic strips, advertisements, food, urban design, and techware are all discussed in crossover reviewing styles, so that a sound might be used to describe an image, or an image a word, or a clothing line a taste. “His writing is reminiscent of Tracy Chapman’s singing,” writes one book reviewer.<sup>46</sup> Another begins, “‘So, I see you have been watching some Oprah,’ I comment on Phindi’s book of choice.”<sup>47</sup> A review of a CD by Thievery Corporation reads, “Picture some cool geezer in a black Armani shirt, grey slacks, and DKNY sandals, smoking a doobie like a zeppelin. That pretty accurately describes the sound of Thievery Corporation.”<sup>48</sup> This convergence between the verbal, the visual, and the sonic marks a displacement of logocentric aesthetic hierarchies that demands an alternative grammar of accessorization.<sup>49</sup>

In this crossover media space, several features predominate. First, cultural texts—books, for example—become forms of quotation or, as I have framed it here, accessories to a broader process of self-stylization that occurs over a wide range of cultural and media sites. Yet the book is constantly dismembered—in some incarnations, it comes to be harnessed to specific textual genres as readers, reviewers, and magazine publics exercise the capacity to choose and discard.

46. Andy Davis, review of *Magnum Chic*, by Hagen Engler, *SL*, November 2000, 130.

47. Phindi Gule, review of *Yesterday I Cried*, by Iyanla Vazant, *Y*, October 2000, 89.

48. Ross Campbell, review of *Thievery Corporation* by Thievery Corporation, *SL*, February 1999, 105.

49. This kind of media crossover is typical among all genres in the reviews section. The visual dimensions of the magazine’s pages fundamentally shape the semiotic environment of the reviews. A book review may be embedded and legible only within a wide range of graphical signs, so that images of book covers appear next to advertisements for Smirnoff vodka or Benson and Hedges cigarettes.

Second, we could say that texts (such as autobiographies and novels) become technologies that assist readers in the process of self-fashioning or self-stylization. Within high-tech, urban, middle-class-youth media regimes that are dominated by the visual and the aural, the book loses its supposed autonomy, its power as a self-contained artifact: there is no book in and of itself but only a textual fragment in the technological constitution of the self.

In the first issue of *Y* magazine (October–November 1998), the books page is entitled “Book’em” and alongside this is the injunction to “read mathafuckers,” appearing as if the letters had been cut out of a newspaper. The books reviewed in this issue included Richard Price’s *Freedomland* (1998), an investigation of the alleged carjacking of a white woman by a black man in the United States, and *News of a Kidnapping* (1997) by Gabriel García Márquez—both reviews drawing connections to South Africa. By the fifth issue of *Y* (April 1999), book reviews appeared under a page titled “(F)Arting About: Arty Things to Do and See,” and the trope of the fan predominates. Of Elmore Leonard’s *Cuba Libre* (1998), it is written: “If you are an Elmore Leonard fan, you will thoroughly enjoy *Cuba Libre*. And if you’re not, read this and you will be.”<sup>50</sup> The fan is ubiquitous across many of the magazine’s issues. A typical CD review reads, “Whether you’re a fan of purity or not, if you’re a Salif fan, Papa is undoubtedly a must-have. And if you’re not into Salif, then best you get into him.”<sup>51</sup> A common discourse, an interchangeable set of criteria, is developed and used—in this case, the implicit or explicit figure of the fan—to establish a visceral position from which you either love or hate whatever you’re reading, watching, seeing, or listening to.

By 2000, a new focus on inspirational autobiographies emerges. In the October issue of *Y* magazine, the reviewers are Bonnie Mbuli, model and coanchor of *Technics Heart of the Beat*, and Phindi Gule, the only female drive-time jock on YFM (and their pictures appear alongside the review). Advertisements are incorporated alongside images of the book covers and of the reviewers themselves, projecting a certain “lifestyle” package. Reading is inserted into—or, rather, books become accessories to—a leisure culture or lifestyle that is projected by the pages themselves. What is created is not a linear genealogy but a spatialized media world, in which the talk-show host Oprah Winfrey, the self-help writer Iyanla Vanzant, DJ Phindi Gule, and the interviewer together create a gendered multimedia space where visually based media forms become increasingly discursive and language becomes increasingly graphic through volume and color. Dis-

50. Inderessa Naidoo, review of *Cuba Libre*, by Elmore Leonard, *Y*, April 1999, 83.

51. Brendon Cooper, review of *Salif Keita* by Salif Keita, *SL*, November 2000, 118.

course becomes less an exclusively language-based activity and more a cross-media set of circulations. By June–July 2002, a new concentration on local novels emerges, but the affective quality of the inspirational (auto)biography is retained: the reviewer of a novel by Capetonian writer Sello Duiker writes that readers are “bound to learn things about themselves—their psychoses, sexuality and the complex ways in which their private lives interact with the public ones.”<sup>52</sup>

Texts, then, become accessories that participate in the shifting shards or discourses of the self. The changing frames given to blackness as a racial identity that we have seen in *Y* magazine render it a fragment and a quotation across shifting configurations of the self in youth culture. The books pages of *Y* magazine reveal a sea change in the semiotic environment in which the act of reading changes, too, particularly as the relationship between the visual and the verbal begins to shift in the context of new media cultures. In this new semiotic environment, the culture of the book, as D. N. Rodowick has noted in another context, is remediated: the linear form of writing and reading becomes increasingly graphical, temporal, and nonlinear.<sup>53</sup> It is no longer the image that illustrates and the written text that comments. Rather, visuality and expression cut against each other, producing a variety of constantly transfiguring forms.

Increasingly, scholarly work on the technologies of public forms, including popular cultural forms, has tended to move toward a focus on circulation and transfiguration, replacing or at least complicating earlier preoccupations with meaning and translation. As analytic vectors of the social, the latter rely on methods of reading derived from the tradition of the book, a tradition that stipulates that a cultural text be meaningful—“that it be a text and confront us as a text whose primary function is to produce meaning and difference and to captivate us in the dialectic play between these two poles.” Such a tradition, moreover, implies a theory of translation grounded in the question of how to translate well from one language to another, as meaning is borne across the chasm of two language codes. Once we set foot in “this topological terrain of chasms and gaps,” as Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar and Elizabeth Povinelli note, “we are swept up in the maelstrom of debates about incommensurability, indeterminacy, and undecidability in translation”: translation is seen as a productive failure. Rather than, or in addition to, asking what happens to meaning as it is borne across languages, genres, or semiotic modes (to “read for meaning”), we might ask what new tech-

52. Phaswane Mpe, “Great South African Reads,” *Y*, June–July 2002, 117.

53. D. N. Rodowick, *Reading the Figural, or, Philosophy after the New Media* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001).



niques for grasping mapping functions, or what new materialities of cultural form, appear in worlds structured increasingly by cultures of circulation. (Of course, traditions of meaning and translation derived from the book might perform these mapping functions as well.) In other words, as Gaonkar and Povinelli so usefully put it, we need “to foreground the social life *of* the form in question rather than reading social life *off* it.”<sup>54</sup>

I have tried to show how, within a culture of accessorization, the remixing context of the review pages in *Y* and *SL* magazines marks the limits of a culture of translation and the rupture of a particular tradition of the book in the terms Gaonkar and Povinelli suggest. *Y* culture engages us to study the making of new languages both within and beyond practices of translatability. Much as we might draw important generalizations about the production of a vernacular form from an analysis of *Y* and *SL* magazines, we need to see, too, how their forms are in constant flux through a stylistics of accessorization, away from the space-time composition of older orders of meaning or cultural practices of translatability.

## Conclusion

A study of *Y* culture, especially of *Y* magazine, reveals the preoccupations of increasingly middle-class young black people in Johannesburg and the intricacy of their modes of self-making. The city itself becomes the engine for this self-stylizing. I have argued that the emergence of new stylizations of the self, embedded in cultures of the body, represents one of the most decisive shifts of the postapartheid era. Moreover, the processes of self-stylization that emerge from *Y* magazine further accessorize a range of cultural texts that, reframed within cross-over media forms, become elements in the aestheticization of the self. Mutant versions of the black self and of literary texts proliferate endlessly: both self and text are open to continuous creative transformation and deformation. *Y* magazine reveals both self and text to be conceptions that recognize mutation and variation, rather than stable, enduring, finished works. Self and text become interfaces for each other in the space-time of the city and the modern.

In their registers of selfhood, the “styles of life” they bring to the surface, their relationship to new media cultures, and their accessorizing of cultural forms, young middle-class South Africans can speak in analytically profound terms. Critics tend to underplay the internal differentiation and contradictory inscriptions of youth-cultural forms in the African city—in particular, the extent to

54. Gaonkar and Povinelli, “Technologies of Public Forms,” 388, 394, 386.

which we can diagnose within an explicitly middle-class consumer culture some of the most significant and interesting practices of inscription, transcription, and transfiguration of our time. What so many critics deem superficial in analytic terms is in fact crucial to our theorization of the contemporary: the “logo-centrism” of consumerism, as Stefan Helgesson has put it, is constantly being de-realized.<sup>55</sup> Y culture is made malleable, multivocal, and dialogical through the power of a transnational imagination that is irreducibly located in the current semiotic landscape of South Africa. On its very surfaces, then, Y culture carries with it the capacity to enrich our contemporary language.

A form-sensitive analysis of cultural phenomena demands more attention than is currently given to the dynamic transfiguration of texts across circulatory matrixes, which is bound not only to contingencies of audience, occasion, and the material nature of the sign but also by the analytic mode in which they are tracked.<sup>56</sup> What I have tracked, in turn, in this essay is a process of accessorization that is marked by race, albeit race constantly remixed, but also contains within it utopian possibilities—vectors of relation rather than of sameness or of difference—for what Gilroy calls “cosmopolitan democracy.” None of which means that race, memory, and the past are reducible to style, only that forms of self-making are changing in ways that scholars seldom pay sufficient attention to. In his work on contemporary sound and visual cultures of the Black Atlantic, Gilroy suggests that new styles of dissidence may emerge from these cultural interfaces, in which discrepant forms combine, conflict, and mutate in promiscuous, chaotic patterns that require the politics of assimilation to be rethought. Whether Y culture in Johannesburg will acquire enough momentum to become a widely recognizable social “movement” remains to be seen. What is happening for the moment, though, is that young people in the city are doing things differently from before. To understand this properly requires a search for what Gilroy has called “technological analogies.”<sup>57</sup>

Gilroy has written, too, of processes of political anatomy, epidermalization, and nanopolitics that occur in the “body-world.” He discusses the shift away from the epidermal signification of difference toward qualities of differentiation projected nanopolitically onto the cells themselves. Race as such is not written into or even onto the body, for the body is not stable or still long enough to permit

55. Stefan Helgesson, “‘Minor disorders’: Ivan Vladislavić and the Devolution of South African English,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* (forthcoming).

56. Gaonkar and Povinelli, “Technologies of Public Forms,” 388.

57. Gilroy, *Between Camps*, 243, 250, 251.

such an act of inscription; what is at stake “is not what the body is or carries inside it but rather what the body does in relation to other bodies.”<sup>58</sup> The conceptual links between race and accessorization articulated by young people in Johannesburg are neither consistent nor fixed. At times, skin is said to be the only means for “telling the difference” between young people who inhabit crossover cultures. At other times, race is located less on the surface of the skin than within mutations of style and choice. Taken together, these inconsistencies shift away from fixed inscriptions of blackness and whiteness.

Although I have deliberately not done so here, it may be necessary to engage with Y culture as a certain “refusal” of the agony of the social, of the class-based poverty and HIV/AIDS pandemic discussed by AbdouMaliq Simone and Frédéric Le Marcis in this issue. Is Y culture the celebration of a lifestyle that refuses to engage with agony, conflict, and exploitation? Or are these in turn the refusal of the accessory? How are we to read the mood of this cultural zone—the hip bucolic—in relation to the analytics of a different, darker mood that lies at a diagonal to the cultural representations we have discussed here?

These questions themselves reveal certain assumptions we may wish to reconsider. On one level, what we see in Y culture is less a denial of “what’s out there” than a cultivated degree of estrangement. This distancing can sound like privilege and has sometimes been associated with the history of elites, though it is a routine feature of the postmodern and postcolonial processes that condition metropolitan life. I began by noting that the new visual cultures of Johannesburg, including Y culture, become the locus of aspiration, a language that both speaks to and silences the psychic and material remainders beyond the text. Yet this very aspirational matrix might be necessary to a process of cultural refiguration. In insisting that young people speak explicitly to the crises and distresses of their society, we might preclude a space of creativity that becomes the engine of new forms, the transformative social potentials of which remain uncertain.

But there is a second rejoinder to the questions posed above, which is a question, too, about the gap—a recurring trope in this essay—between an aspirational culture and real social conditions. What I have tried to draw out from Y culture is ultimately an ethnography of its forms. These forms have been shown to extend beyond the verbal cultures and spatial logics that have so often governed our interpretative frames until now. Rather than focusing on the gaps generated by implicit or explicit theories of meaning, we might rather remain open to

58. Gilroy, *Between Camps*, 255.

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the transfigurative demands that new cultural forms place on how we come to see social life, even in its most distressing dimensions.

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