NEW CRAFT IN A WESTERN CAPE DESIGN IDENTITY

KATHLEEN CONNELLAN

DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE MASTERS DEGREE IN TECHNOLOGY (INTERIOR DESIGN)

IN THE SCHOOL OF DESIGN
AT THE CAPE TECHNIKON

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STATEMENT AND

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This project has not been submitted to any other educational organization for the purpose of receiving a qualification.

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SYNOPSIS

This research project has endeavoured to analyse the extent to which craft ideas and techniques are combining with technological skills in order to formulate an identity for Western Cape furniture design. This identity has been shown to be strongly linked to the determinants of *style*[1], which include the national striving for a South African *zeitgeist*, a sense of unified spirit. The problems of eclecticism are discussed in the light of superficial ethnic co-option.

The new craft of the Western Cape (and more specifically Cape Town) of South Africa, is represented against the background of the old craft of the Arts and Crafts Movement in Britain at the turn of the century. Those old methods and ideas influenced the Cape Colony especially when it was under British rule. This dissertation shows that the new craft ideas and methods are synonymous with the new ideology of South Africa, a new craft for a new South Africa.

The designers and practical work selected to be part of this research all share a common approach in their positive attitude towards experimenting with new techniques and using available resources to produce quality furniture which is accessible to most consumers. The work of four design groups: *Greenspace, Metropolis, Flying Cow and the Montebello Smithy* are discussed in terms of the objectives of this research which are essentially linked to the unravelling of the determinants of style and their relation to the concept identity in the South Africa which has succeeded the first free and fair general

elections of April 1994.

These stylistic determinants have been shown to incorporate a diverse number of variants: The history of the Cape certainly plays a part in the development of style in the region of the Western Cape. The particular problems of tradition are expounded upon in the first section. The aspirations of the people, that is the clients or consumers themselves, are taken into account in terms of what furniture, they, as new South Africans, wish to identify. Style is revealed to mature into identity when it is exposed to the media and consumed, when it reaches the stage of public acclaim. This has happened to the examples of new craft illustrated in this dissertation as a result of the fact that the furniture neither clings to a past nor flies into a fictitious future. The designs are part and parcel of the social, economic and political language of the mid to late 1990s in South Africa. They are a part of contemporary South African history as they illustrate the voices of the people in their striving to acknowledge a new energy and positivity in South African society.

SAMEVATTING

(vertaling: Federico Freschi)

Hierdie projek probeer om te analiseer tot watter mate kunsvlytidees en - tegnieke met tegnologiese vaardigheid kombineer om 'n identiteit vir Weskaapse meubelontwerp te vorm. Dit word bewys dat hierdie identiteit sterk verbind is met die bepalings van styl, wat 'n nasionale strewing na 'n eg Suid-Afrikaanse *zeitgeist* in terme van 'n sin van 'n verenigde gees omhels. Die probleme van eklektisisme word bespreek met betrekking tot oppervlakkige etniese byvoeging.

Die nuwe kunsvlyt van die Weskaap (en, meer spesifiek dié van Kaapstad) word vergelyk met die ou kunsvlyt van die *Arts and Crafts* beweging in Groot Brittanje aan die einde van die negentiende eeu. Dié ou metodes en idees het die Kaap beïnvloed, veral gedurende die Britse regering. Hierdie dissertasie bewys dat die nuwe kunsvlytidees en -metodes sinoniem is met die nuwe ideologie van Suid Afrika: d.w.s., 'n nume kunsvlyt vir 'n nuwe Suid Afrika.

Die ontwerpers en praktiese werk wat gekies is vir die navorsing, deel almal 'n positiewe uitkyk in hulle benadering, in terme van eksperimentering met nuwe tegnieke, en die gebruik van alle beskikbare hulpbronne om meubelstukke van 'n hoë gehalte to produseer wat toeganklik is vir meeste verbruikers. Die werk van vier ontwerpgroepe, naamliks *Greenspace, Metropolis, Flying Cow* en die *Montebello Smithy* word bespreek in terme van die doelwitte van dié navorsing, wat hoosaaklik verbind is met die ontwarring van die bepalings van styl en hulle verwantskap met die konsep van

identitieit in Suid-Afrika nà die eerste vrye en regverdige algemene verkiesing van April 1994.

Dit word bewys dat hierdie stylistiese bepalings verskillende variante behels: Die geskiedenis van die Kaap, byvoorbeeld, speel beslis 'n rol in terme van die ontwikkeling van styl in die Weskaapse gebied. Die besondere probleme van tradiesie word uitgelê in die eerste gedeelte. Die verlange van die mense, d.w.s. die kliënte en/of verbruikers self, wrod in ag geneem in terme van die meublestukke waarmee hulle, as nuwe Suid-Afrikaners, wil identifiseër. Dit word bewys dat style in identiteit verander en verouder wanneer dit blootgestel word voor die media; d.w.s. wanneer dit die stadium van oopenbare goedkeuring bereik. Laasgenoemde het wel plaasgevind met die voorbeelde van die nuwe kunsvlyt wat die dié dissertasie geïllustreer is, as gevolg van die feit dat die meubelstukke nòg vasklou aan die verlede, nòg in 'n denkbeeldige toekoms in vlug nie. Die onterpe vorm heeltemaal deel van die sosiale, ekononomies en politiese taal van die middel - tot laat-negentigerjare in Suid-Afrika. Omdat hulle die strewing van die volk om 'n nuwe energie in positiewiteit in die Suid-Afrikaanse samelewing illustreer, vorm hulle dus 'n gedeelte van kontemporêre Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

PREFACE

The body of this research evolved out of my particular interest in *style* and material culture within the complexities of the South African political situation. My previous study into the problems of defining style in South African urban black art laid the foundations for an investigation into the stylistic attributes of style in the functional art of furniture design. Considerations on style have been inextricably linked to identity in terms of a search for a South African *zeitgeist* in Mandela's rule of South Africa. This South Africa is commonly referred to as the "New South Africa". It is therefore the geographical/political identity that is at the heart of this research.

It is important to stress that I am not a design practitioner and that my previous degree was an Art History degree. In addition there is at this stage no "Design History degree" option available at South African universities and technikons. In the absence of a previous academic model, I had of necessity to steer myself. My reading has ranged from applicable art historical and cultural history sources to a diverse collection of design journals and writings. In view of the above it is hoped that the hybrid combination of source material will be justified. It was always my intention to root my research in the examples of the actual practical work under scrutiny in order to eliminate the possibility of obfuscating the issue.

It is also necessary to clarify the use of the terms *craft* and *design* in this thesis. The *new craft* of this research is a combination of both craft and design, no distinction is made between them. However

the interviewees have tended to use both terms interchangeably which may lead to confusion. It must therefore be stressed that whenever the term *design* is used, it is assimilated into the meaning of the new craft. Whenever the term *craft* is used on its own it carries the traditional connotation of *handcraft*.

It is hoped that this research will stimulate further research into design identity in South Africa. The possibilities in the area of graphic and textile design are particularly interesting.
Cautious design researchers may feel that South African design history does not have sufficient hindsight to determine direction in design and craft, that we do not have sufficient years between us and the designs that we are analysing. It is true that there are many variants at play which are still reacting with the present and impede the work of the researcher. Researchers cannot merely wait for time to pass. Therefore the initial attempts to document and uncover tendencies in South African design, even on a regional basis, serve as a starting point for further and more comprehensive research.

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation presents the phenomenon of a new type of craft emerging as a result of economic, technological and cultural determinants. This *new type of craft will be referred to as the new craft* during the course of this dissertation.

The central hypothesis of this research is that the style of the new craft is a solution to the problems of identity associated with First world eclecticism, in that it implements a combination of technologies and addresses the problems of a developing country such as South Africa.

As design and identity are broad issues, they need to be applied with a particular focus in order to avoid generalizations. Therefore the geographic parameters set for this research project are confined to the Western Cape Province of South Africa with specific reference to the metropolitan centre of Cape Town. It is the *geographic* and *political identity* that is at the heart of it. The designers belong to the predominantly white middle class sector of the South African population. They are all fairly young (between twenty-five and thirty-five). The market is also predominantly white middle class. The reasons for this is that the majority of the South African population are black people who have been deprived of an education. This majority is not yet in a position to make a significant difference to the direction of design in South Africa. However the problems of this historically disadvantaged and underprivileged class

serve as a constant background to the responsibilities of the design researched in this project.

The category of practical work undertaken for research is restricted to furniture and furniture accessories although it is sometimes necessary to include the broader discipline of industrial design into the discussion for the sake of clarifying a particular point.

The time parameters of this research include a brief historical analogy of craft and capitalism from the beginning of settled civilization, but the particular time period of the new craft is 1994 and 1995 in South Africa. This is the time immediately preceding and following the first free and fair general elections in the history of South Africa. The time period is therefore crucial to the analysis of the designs. The designs under scrutiny are all dated within the two years of 1994 and 1995: They are therefore to be reviewed in the light of the preceding decades of eclecticism and apathy in design.

The basic premise for this research is that there is an urgent need to document the initiatives of these young designers who are making an impact on the design of furniture in *post-election* South Africa.

The relevance of this research is particularly significant in terms of the lack of serious academic research into design and design theory in South Africa. Design history and theory is an established discipline in America, the United Kingdom and Europe but it is not developed in South Africa. Design produced in South Africa has not been seen as worthy of any sort of recognition as a result of a

perception that overseas design is superior and therefore to be imitated or merely imported.

Academic status for African art history was achieved in the 1950s when occasional courses in West and Central African sculpture began to be offered at universities in the USA (Adams 1989:55). Now forty years later it is time for African (and specifically South African) design history to be acknowledged as a legitimate academic discipline.

There is at present only one South African design journal, *Image and Text* published by the University of Pretoria. This is a new publication which has only four issues to date. Most of the academic research projects that have been undertaken in design have included a practical component. Beverly Gower completed a Masters diploma in interior design in 1989, entitled *Craft Idealism as an Influence on Design* which opened up the need for further research on issues that relate to the problems inherent in ideology and status in design in South Africa.

A primary objective of this dissertation is to explore the relationship between style and identity in Western Cape furniture. This will be done within the parameters of national expectations in the *new* South Africa.

Chapter one and two form a unit in that they both address the understanding of craft in relation to design. Chapter one concentrates on the various interpretations of craft in both

terminology and history. The problems of craft's association with tradition and nature are posed beside the growth of craft in the development of capitalism. A Marxist argument is adopted to highlight the differences between the communal base of craft as opposed to the individual base of design and capitalism. The theories of John Ruskin and William Morris are largely used to substantiate this viewpoint.

The *old* craft of chapter one is developed into the *new* craft in chapter two. The second chapter endeavours to exemplify the meaning of *new craft* by referring directly to the illustrations of design examples. The design-craft exhibition held in February 1995 in conjunction with the international Design Education Forum conference, is reviewed as a determining factor in establishing recognition for the designers of the new craft. Reasons for choices of materials as well as the methods of making are closely scrutinized in terms of a new as opposed to an *old* craft. Emphasis is placed on the use of available resources as an appropriate means of designing within the financial, technological as well as ecological constraints.

The examples of new craft discussed in chapter two are scrutinized in terms of style in chapter three. Chapter three forms the beginning of the second section of this dissertation which is specifically concerned with style and identity. In an attempt to arrive at an understanding of style, the significance of place and time is emphasized and an historical survey of local style is provided.

The third chapter attempts to contextualize style. However bearing the words of Timo Smuts (1994) in mind: "There are many texts within

a context" (unpublished paper South Africa Association of Art Historians). Therefore although a contextualization of style is central to the structure of this dissertation it also raises many more issues which are discussed further in the determination of identity in chapter four. Shapiro, as well as Gombrich's theories of style are used as points of departure in the analysis of the design examples in chapter three. A combination of formal and contextual analysis is used in the discussion of the examples of furniture.

Chapter four expands upon points that are more specifically theoretical than in the previous chapters. The fourth chapter separates style from identity without cutting the cord. Lacan's theory on the socialized "I" is adopted to define the development of style when it is subjected to the forces of politics and marketing. This chapter suggests that identity is arrived at when style has come of age. When the product has been placed firmly within the world.

Chapter four investigates the connection between design awareness and marketing within the parameters of a politicized society. Forms of propaganda and public communication will be shown to be part of the broad understanding of marketing. The correlation between nationalism and national design identity will be discussed in terms of design as a political act and design as a national asset. The purpose of including and excluding certain African features in the formulation of a stylistic identity will be assessed in the light of social and political dynamics.

SECTION A. CRAFT: HISTORY, STATUS AND DEVELOPMENTS

CHAPTER ONE

AN ANALYSIS OF THE INTERPRETATIONS OF CRAFT.

The title of this dissertation implies that there is a new craft as opposed to the 'old' or established understanding of craft. This chapter will set out to explore the various interpretations of craft in terminology and history.

TERMINOLOGY

An analysis of meaning (in terminology and language) is always fraught with the complexities arising from connotations as opposed to denotations. At worst such an analysis can be reduced to semantics and at best it can position itself in the context of culture, because language itself is a cultural construct (Seldon 1989:78).

Lucie-Smith (1981:11) stated that "The word 'craft' is like so many important words in English, brief, pungent and ambiguous". It is true that the brevity of the word is in no way indicative of a crisp and concise meaning but this does not necessarily presuppose ambiguity. Roland Barthes promoted the post-structural theory of the plural text in the 1960s and 1970s. Barthes stressed the *process* of signification as opposed to the attributing of meaning. Seldon writes that Barthes believed: "The worst sin a writer can commit is to pretend that language is a natural transparent medium through which the reader

grasps a solid and unified 'truth' or 'reality'" (Seldon 1989:78). A term like craft, is not in itself ambiguous, but it is open to ambiguity in both its usage and reading.

In the structuralist/formalist[2] methodology of modernism, craft as a term would fall into the category of verbal iconography. Literary theory was somewhat ahead of art and design theory in the 1960s and 1970s when a great deal of art and design writing was still using the modernist methodology. This dissertation is based on the premise that craft (until very recently) has still been interpreted as having a unique and intrinsic nature in much of the art, craft and design literature[3]. The historic associations of the term craft have clothed it in a specific meaning. An iconographic meaning.

The historic associations that resulted in an iconographic meaning of craft were strengthened by the denotations in the popularly used dictionaries. The modernist striving to *define* in order to proceed 'safely' in analysis, is evident in Bev Gower's (1989) Masters' thesis where he expounded on the various definitions of craft in an attempt to arrive at a clear understanding of the term in relation to the practice. Gower follows Lucie-Smith by referring to the Shorter Oxford Dictionary's sixth explanation of craft: "A calling requiring special skill and knowledge; especially a manual art, a handicraft" (cited by Gower 1989:34). This is the common dictionary denotation of craft which specifically aligns it to skill of a particularly manual nature.

In the 1880 edition of *Websters' Dictionary of the English Language*

craft is followed by the Anglo-Saxon *cräft* and the German, Swedish and Danish derivatives *kraft*, all meaning "power". This derivation is of particular interest in terms of Ruskinian theory.

The views of John Ruskin (1819-1900) have contributed to a particularly ecclesiastical understanding of craft. This understanding of craft brings the *hand* and the *spirit* together, thereby combining power and skill:

> It is not enough that it has the Form, if it have not also the power and life.
> It is not enough that it has the Power, if it have not the form ...
> (Ruskin 1870 cited by Evans 1980:6).

The above incorporation of the whole person, both physical and spiritual, contributed to Ruskin's denigration of the machine as an evil of modern industrialization. He equated the art of making by hand with morality itself. The accelerated pace of industrialization in early to mid nineteenth century Britain brought about the gross over design of products, some of which were exhibited at the 1851 "Crystal Palace Exhibition". Reactions to the bad quality of the designs were widespread and Ruskin's controversial and radically oppositional views were published:

> Men were not intended to work with the accuracy of tools to be precise and perfect in all their actions. If you will have that precision out of them you must unhumanize

them

(cited by Haslam 1988:8).

THE ARTS AND CRAFTS MOVEMENT

It was in such a climate that the Arts and Crafts Movement arose in Britain."It is important to stress that the Arts and Crafts was labelled a movement and not a style, thereby implying an underlying political or philosophical stance, which was based on social and moral considerations" (Osborne 1989:49). As such it is similar to the new craft in South Africa which is also difficult to stylistically pin down. However it must be pointed out that the Arts and Crafts Movement is not used as a direct model for the new craft (which is the subject of this thesis) but rather as an analogy so that the distinction, differences, developments as well as certain similarities to the new craft are clear.

The leader of the old Arts and Crafts' Movement William Morris, was also intimately associated with the Pre-Raphaelites[4] and was greatly influenced by Ruskin's writings. He shared Ruskin's belief in the need for people to work in communion with each other and share their skills in order to create in a spirit of harmony: "... it is not one nor another that produces it; but their union in certain measures ..." (Ruskin 1870 cited by Evans 1980:6). Ruskin sought to recall "The Spirit of the Gothic" in his renowned volumes *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849). He elevated the ideals of the small Gothic village community that devoted its lifetime and the lifetimes of its children to the building of a cathedral that was to them a symbol of their unified work and worship, a magnificent monument of praise. The

words of Edward Matchett, a tenth century poet, express the devotion of such dedicated craftwork eloquently:

> Let us make a thing of beauty
> that long may live when we are gone;
> Let us make a thing of beauty that
> hungry souls may feast upon;
> Whether it be in wood or marble, music, art or poetry,
> Let us make a thing of beauty to help set man's bound
> spirit free
> (cited by Painton 1992:8).

It was the preaching on team-workmanship and the labour of love in work, that fired William Morris to revive the Medieval guilds in the English countryside. By removing the location of work from the London of the late nineteenth century, Morris and the other adherents to the Arts and Crafts philosophy were able to make furniture and other items for household use without the shadow of industrial smog stifling their spirit. The country workshops or handicraft-guilds to the 1880s and 1890s were a welcome option to the followers of Morris' Arts and Crafts philosophy. Here they used hand tools and very basic machinery only (fig. 1). Morris gave many lectures on Arts and Crafts philosophy and by the 1880s the movement had taken on the intensity of a religion which spread far and wide.

South Africa was among the regions to be influenced by Morris's theories[5]. Cecil John Rhodes, the founder of the de Beers Mining Company in 1890 and later Prime Minister of the Cape, commissioned

the young British architect Herbert Baker to build the now historic house on the Groote Schuur estate in Cape Town. This led to many other commissions in South Africa including the Union Buildings in Pretoria (executive government offices). Baker was greatly influenced by Morris' teachings and helped spread the Arts and Crafts' philosophy in South Africa through a number of other important projects. His "... use of local materials and local craftsmen to work the stone, wood and metal ... [and] ... the inclusion in the walls of small holes in which birds could build their nests" (Gutsche 1966:193) attracted the attention of the nation-building and pioneering spirit of Lady Florence Phillips, wife of the mining magnate Sir Lionel Phillips. Lady Phillips had heard of Morris' theories from Dorothea Fairbridge[6] who had formed the "Guild of Loyal Women" to relieve distress during the Anglo Boer War (1899-1902). The formation of such a guild in a time of war is significant of the constructive influence that craft and handwork has in a time of crisis. Lady Phillips became an "apostle" of William Morris and strove to show the "crushed and homeless people" how "crafts and industries" could bring them to their feet again (Gutsche 1966:199).

In Britain, Morris combined Ruskinian theory with that of Karl Marx and formulated an ideology that appealed to many of the disillusioned people in the then new industrial world. This was the inspired teamworkmanship of the Gothic combined with the socialist ideals of community sharing. Marx wrote strongly against the effects of factory labour on the individual worker and developed the "theory of alienation" that was to resound in the workplace and call many

sufferers to his cause. The alienation of labour was as a result of the inability of the designer to be in control of his work from the initial concept through to the end. As a result of industrialization (and according to Marx, capitalism) the manufacturing process no longer had the unity that was possible in the teamwork and communal base of the medieval guilds. People and their creative work processes had been divided into stages. Marx enlarged upon the damage this brought about:

> What constitutes the alienation of labour? First, that the work is *external* to the worker, that it is not part of his nature; and that consequently, he does not fulfil himself in his work but denies himself, has a feeling of misery rather than well-being, does not develop freely his mental and physical energies but is physically exhausted and mentally debased. The worker, therefore, feels himself at home only during his leisure time, whereas at work he feels homeless. His work is not voluntary but imposed, *forced labour* ...
> (cited by Avineri 1970:106).

NATURE

Morris' Arts and Crafts' philosophy addressed these ills by centring on the concept of unity. The creator and worker were one and the same, the methods and materials were based on nature. The working environment was in tune with nature not separated from it. This interpretation of craft remains one of the strongest to the present day.

Critics of the Arts and Crafts philosophy can also use its association with nature to denigrate the status of craft in relation to design in the capitalist world. For example craft's association with "nature" has played a part in placing it into the category of low-technology and Third World economy, in a world where high-technology has hegemonic status. Craft objects are "crafted" by hand. *In a First world system of appraisal the hand is a low-tech tool. This dissertation asserts that the hand is the most basic tool that we have but it is also the most sophisticated when combined with the human intellect and creativity (Connellan 1994:17).*

Craft's association with nature connects it to the earth and all that is natural as opposed to synthetic. Wood and stone, ingredients that are borne of the earth, constitute the materials used. The debate on the authenticity of materials grew particularly heated in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Extreme views on simplicity and purity in form and materials were put forward by the opponents of Art Nouveau[7].

The connection between craft and the natural world is an ideology which can be traced back to early religious beliefs. Nature can indeed be regarded as the first patron of the arts and crafts. The matriarchal societies of the Stone Ages paid homage to the fertility of the earth and saw in it the source of fertility and survival amongst themselves. The Pagan goddesses and gods were representations of the natural elements. In them was the force of life. Nature was the only continuum. Nature gods continued in the western world until the Emperor Constantine recognized Christianity in the fourth century

AD.

In non-western societies nature remained and still remains a source of worship. Traditional chiefs in South Africa remain rooted in a lasting respect for nature. The Sangomas[6] of these communities offer natural remedies for ailments of the mind and body which even urbanized people believe in. The mud and reed huts of the Xhosa and Zulu in South Africa also echo the natural colours and forms of the landscape.

TRADITION

Craft is associated with both nature and *tradition*. The link with tradition could also be used by the opponents of craft to place craft in the past as opposed to the present. Tradition in this sense can be described as the practices that a community have shared for a very long time. Time becomes the almighty judge of continuance. Tradition can be used to legitimize and denigrate. Designers who wish to disassociate themselves from craft may use tradition as a witness to craft's allegiance to a superstitious past. The intimation is that craft must be relegated to those who cling to "tradition" and do not have the courage to face the onslaught of the advance into technology. However tradition relates to style(s) as well as technology.

Hobsbawn and Ranger's book *The Invention of Tradition* (1994) offers an interesting alternate interpretation of traditon. These editors wrote that many traditions were in fact invented and did not evolve

as part of a natural sequence of human development (1994:2). Tradition in these terms can be seen as a human construct. This interpretation of tradition strengthens the idea of a new craft which is now inventing new traditions suitable for a new age. The stigma of tradition in relation to the craft versus design debate, is not important in a new craft that does not cling to any practice for its sake alone.

CRAFT AND CAPITALISM

The above interpretations of the links with nature and "tradition" have served to cloud the view of craft as having progressive qualities. Progress (in terms of modernist *zeitgeist*) was seen to be synonymous with capitalist invention. Prior to industrialization there was no division between craft and design. The implementation of categories and the setting up of a hierarchical system can be equated with the segregation of classes in the industrial and post-industrial age. Marx saw the capitalist economic system as the core problem. In order to further explore the existing and possible interpretations of craft and craft status, it is necessary to situate the history of craft within the history of capitalism.

Leatt, Kneifel and Nürnberger (1986) divide capitalism into seven historical stages, namely subsistence economy, slavery, feudalism, pre-industrial or merchant capitalism, early industrial capitalism, twentieth century capitalism (which may be divided int the two major states of pre- and post-World War 2), and late or mature capitalism. An examination of the place of craft within each of these scenarios reveals a gradual erosion of its status.

Within a subsistence economy, craft found its place in the making of necessary and functional items which contributed directly to daily living. Craft was not segregated from production, it *was* production. In addition, it was seen to be a "collective" enterprise, that is the work and property of the family and not of an individual.

The introduction of slavery caused the first signs of categorization in work to emerge. People were bought and used as labour in order to obtain what was perceived to be a higher level of civilization. The owners of the slaves did not 'dirty' their hands with work. Within this system of control, craftwork was allotted a subservient place, that of slave labour. However an example of slaves being able to use their creative talents freely resulted in some of the most beautiful Cape furniture and masonry which was done by Malay slaves in the early days of the colony (Fransen 1982:61, 70, 71) (figs. 37,38).

Feudal as well as pre-industrial capitalism included the Medieval and Gothic periods which have already been described as high points in the history of craft. There was a community spirit that connected the people with each other and their work. This same sense of personal connection will prove to be a significant point in relation to the new craft approach to working together[9].

In the periods of colonization, trade expanded and "...Political rulers came to realise that their own strength depended on the prosperity of the capitalists, and sought to create conditions favourable to economic development" (Leatt et al. 1986:3-4). In early industrial capitalism, greater capital growth was transformed into

greater productive capacity and a series of important inventions in the eighteenth century opened the way to more efficient modes of production. There was a consequent shift from trade to industry: "The manufacturing process moved from rural households to urban factories" (ibid). Those processes that remained in the household were labelled craft as opposed to the industrial production of "designed" goods.

The association of craft with the home raises the issue of craft and patriarchy. The house and home was predominantly associated with women. Feminist research has revealed the home to be "...a primary site of subordination" in terms of gender relations (Goodall 1983:50). It was socially accepted that a man's work was out of the home and therefore in industry, while women's work remained in the home, which contributed to the subordination of craft status. It should however be remembered that industrial capitalists had no scruples in using women and young children as cheap labour in the factories and mines during early industrial capitalism.

A Marxist analysis of craft in the above situation, reveals that it was the capitalist economy that acquired power, status and money by instituting a hierarchical system in labour which saw the work done out of the factory as non-work. With acknowledgement to Aristotle's terminology, Marx wrote that *exchange-value* determines *use-value*. He went on to explain that use-values serve directly as a means of existence but those means of existence were in themselves products of social activity. Marx posited that within capitalism social activity is ultimately based on exchange-value and consequently everything is rated accordingly.

Therefore in Marxist language the process of alienation has commodified all values. Under the capitalist system of criteria for success, craft was seen to be labour intensive as a result of hand processes in production. Although craft did have exchange value, it was assessed as being non-profitable and therefore non-viable because mass production could not take place. One-offs, short runs and batch production could not be equated with the speed and cost-efficiency of standardization and mass production.

Two key factors in capitalism are competition and individualism. The community orientation of shared skills in traditional craft is ideologically at odds with what capitalism stands for in terms of achievement. Capitalism strives towards the end while craft is content with the means and process which evolves towards an end.

This interpretation of craft in the early industrial era remained with little change through the subsequent stages of capitalism. Twentieth century capitalism saw the result of World Wars One and Two bringing about an acceleration in methods of production which further distanced itself from craft production methods. Speed and efficiency had been equated with life itself in the war years.

However in the midst of political and economic instability, the dream of the architect Walter Gropius was fulfilled when the Grand Duke of Sax-Weimar invited him to take over the directorship of both the Arts Academy and the Polytechnic in Weimar in 1913. Gropius combined the two and established the *Bauhaus* which he moved to Dassau in 1925 as a unified whole. He created a guild of craftspeople that was both a

workshop and a laboratory (Pevsner 1975:38).

Gropius wished to integrate the arts, crafts and design so that objects of use could be made to suit the changing needs of a market that could not turn its back on industry. It was his intention to make functionalism an aesthetic in its own right so that simplicity reigned in classic, rational modernism.

The art critic Herbert Read applauded Gropius's standpoint and supported it by writing that "...the handicrafts and industry ... are opposites perpetually approaching each other" he went on to say that the handicrafts were changing their traditional nature and that they would have a future in research laboratories which would contribute to the evolution and perfecting of new type-forms (Read 1956:63).

However many people were disillusioned with the carnage that the capitalist powers had wrought in the First and Second World War and Socialist political parties gained greater strength in First and Third world countries. In the ensuing years of the Cold War, communism which was wrongly equated with Marxism, was placed in direct opposition to capitalism. The pressure or threat of communism drove many countries to more extreme capitalism. After the 1948 general election in South Africa the Nationalist Afrikaner government began to assume state control over a number of industries which ironically put its economic control on a par with the communism that it propagated to be "die groot gevaar"[18].

On the international front smaller firms amalgamated or were "swallowed up" to form huge multinational corporations. The political independence of Third World countries became superficial as their economies were manipulated to an increasing extent in the metropolitan centres of the world. The idea that a large number of entrepreneurs should compete with each other in a free market weakened. The market began to be dominated by monopolies, consumption became strongly influenced by shrewd salesmanship and aggressive advertising, capital ownership spread to thousands of shareholders (Leatt et al. 1986:3-4).

The early forms of capitalism which ideally allowed for individual ingenuity and daring initiative were therefore overtaken by a "self-perpetuating", institutionalized process of considerable power (ibid).

Within the above scenario hand-craft was a lost cause. The value system of society became imbued with the synthetic world in late and mature capitalism. Speed and power did not combine with natural materials and time consuming handwork. It remains for the new craft to succeed in this combination.

Although the editors I have been relying on stopped at "late or mature capitalism", now in 1995 it is certainly time to consider more shifts within capitalism as a result of the alarming realization that the world's resources are indeed running out. This dissertation will set out to propose that a solution to this problem lies in a turning back of the wheel of capitalism (and history) in order to

extricate what was good from all the earliest forms of capitalism and production and to build a new *post-capitalist* society. "The problem of the future of capitalism is really not a problem of economics, nor is it a problem simply of an free enterprise system; it is fundamentally the problem of the future of freedom" (Friedman 1976:21).

The message of the renowned economist, Milton Friedman said that in order to thrive and survive within capitalism, a system of *free choice* must prevail. Friedman recalled the 1776 treatise on economics by Adam Smith: "It analysed the way in which a market system could combine the freedom of individuals to pursue their own objectives with the extensive cooperation and collaboration needed in the economic field to produce our food, our clothing, our housing. Adam Smith's key insight was that both parties to an exchange can benefit "... *so long as cooperation is strictly voluntary*, ..." (Friedman 1980:1). Friedman ascertained that the real danger in economics is monopoly, because with monopoly there is no freedom. If freedom has indeed been lost in late and mature capitalism, the argument to resuscitate the freedom of a subsistence economy together with the ingenuity and initiative of early merchant capitalism, is strong. If people can guard against individual greed and work towards the enhancement of their society, then the community aspect of socialist economy could combine realistically with the drive of a capitalist economy.

Has society come full circle? The concept of a new craft movement in the Western Cape of South Africa will be fully explored in chapter

two. However a reassessment of the crafts has also been called for in recent critical writing and exhibitions from overseas.

INTERNATIONAL VIEWS ON THE STATUS OF CRAFT

An exhibition at the Crafts Council Gallery in London held in March 1994 was an investigation into the state of crafts in Britain. Liz Farrelly wrote that the exhibition revealed a united and defiant stance with

> ...flat-pack perspex tables [which would] ... surprise anybody who tends to dismiss craft as gritty brown pots and basket weaving. These makers - a more accurate word than craftspeople, since some of them trained as designers - are as happy working with synthetic materials as they are drawing their inspiration from urban life, the mass media, fine art and new technologies (Farrelly 1994:10).

The use of synthetic as well as natural materials will also be discussed in terms of South African design in chapter two. In spite of the positive tone of the above report, it is also obvious that labelling remains a problem. What craftspeople are doing cannot, it appears, be included in the higher echelons of design. However it would also appear that "making" is regarded as a step up from "crafting". On the other hand craft is sometimes bracketed with fine art and under this hierarchy, design is lower down. However this thesis considers the debate of *craft versus design* only, as the *art/design* debate is an extensive subject in its own right.

The ancient and historic Abingdon Museum's recent refurbishment has also been noted as a triumph for the crafts. "Can craftwork give history a contemporary relevance by acting as a bridge between past and present?" asks Nicole Swengley of *Crafts* (1994:14). It appears that the curator Emily Leach as well as the designer Eric de Graaf felt that this was certainly the case. de Graaf spoke of his glass-topped, oak display cases as having a style that tied in with the building : "... I wanted to create a look of understated classicism ... to enable the old objects to be shown in a modern way ..." (ibid). De Graaf also designed a folding chair for museum audiences, which coordinated with the display cabinets. Swengley writes that the design is ingenious as each chair folds flat to a slim 8.2cm to facilitate storage (fig. 2).

Designs such as these are in keeping with the original standards set up by the Council for Industrial Design which was established in Britain in 1944. The Royal College of Art incorporated design which was related to industrial and commercial processes into its programme in 1949 (Read 1978:8). An article subtitled: *Good Design for 1949* published in 1948, offers a comprehensive survey of categories and standards. The message was clear, "... simple design applied to durable materials and fitted to its function is ... growing in favour" (*il Interiors* 1948:114). It is also significant to note that in assistance towards people who had lost their homes and possessions in the war bombings, the production of simple, low-cost furniture was promoted and sponsored by governments. In Germany and Britain the programme of *Utility Furniture* revealed basic designs that were extremely akin to the Arts and Crafts furniture (Heskett 1980:197).

When posted to England on ambassadorial duty, the German diplomat Herman Muthesius had been extremely impressed with the Arts and Crafts designs.

In 1949 the awards of the Museum of Modern Art low-cost furniture competition went to designers who (according to Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., director of the competition and consultant on industrial design at the museum) produced "...demountable furniture ... a reduced number of parts, often achieved by the use of two diagonally crossed members to form the four legs. Designers of storage units [who] tried to do away with multiple joints ... " (*Il Interiors* 1949:17).

It is granted that the above simplicity of design was part of post-World War Two reconstruction. However that minimal quality was to become so successful in functional and aesthetic terms, that simple, rational design was soon held up to be pure design, the epitome of Modernism. Where does craft fit in to this scenario? The furniture of the Arts and Crafts had been simple and practical. Design had annexed an essence of craft and all in the name of "Good Design". This design was rooted in the Arts and Crafts principles. Interpreted in this light the hierarchical placing of design above craft appears to be ironic.

Charles Samaurez Smith, Director of the National Portrait Gallery in London, wrote that the notion of subsidiarity is intellectually indefensible (1993:45). He refers to the arbitrary reasons behind the choice of research topics: "As long as there is more prestige to be earned in the reinterpretation of the works of Hogarth, art

historians will go on doing that instead of studying Chelsea porcelain" (1993:46). However Smith also writes critically of the practices of design history by saying that it is still caught in the shackles of modernism by trying to abolish the aesthetic dimension: "... [design history] is essentially locked into a view of the subject which regards its centre as being the development of industrial, product and graphic design in England, America and Germany ..." (ibid).

In the same vein, Paul Greenhalgh wrote that:

> When coupled with 'old-style' art history, this brand of design history generates a kind of ideology of embarrassment around the crafts, which obliges us to be ashamed of their delicacies, contradictions and idiosyncracies. We feel we must apologize if the objects do not have a basis in Utopian morality, if they are not produced in quantity, if they do not display mannerisms from contemporary painting and sculpture, or if they have surface pattern (1993:16).

The marginalization of the status of craft in relation to design is particularly problematic when analyzed within the present process of democratization within South Africa. A modernist methodology is also not appropriate for the analysis of objects in an age which is calling for the greater recognition of different cultures. England, America and Germany may be representative of established First World countries, but countries like South Africa have a history filled with

artifacts that are now inspiring an interesting aesthetic dimension in contemporary design. This aesthetic dimension need not mean that the designs are "decorated" or that they lack in a simplicity that runs counter to the essentials of functionalism.

The simple, functional yet essentially aesthetic headrests, stools, staffs and pots used by South African chiefs and rural people (for example, the *Zulu*) have inscribed geometric motifs and basic forms that are determined by the materials used. Before urbanization and Westernization these "traditional" items were crafted by hand by people reliant on nature for survival. The whole aspect of the hunter-crafter African society serves as an inspiration to South African designers (new craftspeople) who seek to draw upon the heritage of their own country.

This, together with the various interpretations of craft discussed in chapter one, serve as a preliminary to the development of the *new craft* in chapter two, three and four.

CHAPTER TWO

THE EXISTENCE OF A *NEW CRAFT MOVEMENT* IN WESTERN CAPE FURNITURE DESIGN

Against the background of the "old" craft movement which initiated out of an opposition to the industrial age, this dissertation posits the theory that a new craft movement has arisen in what is now the technological age. This movement is in tune with technology and not at odds with it. The new craft movement is therefore not a revival of the old Arts and Crafts movement.

As was pointed out in the previous chapter, Morris had an abhorrence of the power and speed of industry because he saw it as the destructive force of all that he had held as beautiful. The sad irony was that the hand processes that were used in the Arts and Crafts Movement were time consuming and therefore extremely costly, with the ultimate product only being affordable to the moneyed class of industrial exploitation. Morris wanted to reach the person in the street and he failed.

Therefore at the outset of this chapter and in an age when relevance and transparency are buzz words, it is appropriate to ask the following question: Will the new craft initiative which embraces industry and technology, reach the ordinary person or also end up as an elitist or "yuppie" indulgence? This question requires time for an adequate answer. However an analysis of the selection of designs and

designers within this section will serve to illustrate the hypothesis of this dissertation. It is the opinion of this author that the new craft (of which there are many examples in the Western Cape) will determine the future of furniture design in South Africa. The reason for this is the need to combine low and high technology into a more accessible, intermediate technology which is part of the reality of the "New" South African RDP (Reconstruction and Development Programme).[11] If the new craft initiative is taken seriously in terms of small and medium business enterprises, then it will not be a yuppie fashion accessory but a real contribution to economic growth as well as design identity in South Africa.

DESIGN-CRAFT EXHIBITION:

In February 1995, the Design Education Forum of Southern Africa[12] held an international conference in Cape Town. The conference theme was: *Design Education and Small Business Development for Developing Countries*. With the emphasis on small businesses at a time when the new South Africa is striving to redress the imbalances of the past apartheid era, many thought-provoking papers were delivered by local and international delegates.

Amik Kalsi (Kenya), representing the United Nations centre for Human Settlements, said that "... a dual economy in Africa will remain for a while and small businesses are the way ahead" (unpublished proceedings of the Design Education Forum conference). Dr. Raj Ishar (Paris), the director of the International Fund for the Promotion of Culture at UNESO, said that "... a change of consciousness is needed if we are to collectively value culture as part of the economy" in his keynote address (ibid). The emphasis on making responsible design

that contributed to the needs of the people and thereby also contributed meaningfully to the growth of economy was a central issue during the conference.

There were also four exhibitions running concurrently with the conference:

1. A professional design exhibition.
2. A student "working" exhibition.
3. A design-craft exhibition.
4. An exhibition of student work.

Of these four exhibitions the design-craft exhibition was displayed in the foyer of the conference venue (the administration block of the Peninsula Technikon). This proved to be an excellent venue as the delegates had to walk through the exhibition space to access the conference hall. The theme of the design-craft exhibition set out to reflect the coming together of traditional craft concepts, techniques and approaches to construction with those of "First World" technology in South Africa. The marriage of the two is indicative of what can be termed a new craft movement.

The committee of the design-craft exhibition was representative of a group of people who are all equally committed to the cause of including quality craft into the category of appropriate design in South Africa. The convenor, Bev Gower, was called upon by the Design Institute of the SABS (South African Bureau of Standards) to take responsibility for a "craft" exhibition as one of the supporting items to the Design Education conference. Gower is the retired

associate director of Industrial and Interior design at the Cape Technikon's School of Design. He is personally involved in making quality design-craft furniture and openly admits to being influenced by William Morris's theories. Gower's own Master's research served as a starting point for this research project. Gower's closing words in the *Convenor's Message* of the design-craft exhibition brochure were: "... this exhibition is a beginning, an attempt at establishing standards and an expectation of a new status for craft in our region" (1995: Exhibition Brochure).

The rest of the committee included myself as coordinator and:
Jennifer Sorrell, editor of the ADA (architecture, design art magazine).
Tessa Graaf, director of the *Montebello Centre for Design*[13].
Neziswa Jordan and Julia Kukard, directors of *Just Exchange*[14].
Kathy Ackermann, design consultant for *Boardmans*[15].

The exhibition committee for the design-craft exhibition was determined to be as inclusive and representative as possible. The broad informal sector was not excluded from selection as long as requirements were met. This does not presuppose tokenism. It was a central aim of the committee to be proactive in terms of reaching out to the underprivileged communities because it is widely accepted that the African communities have craft skills that are put to use in the sprawling squatter settlements. The requirements for selection stipulated that all products had to be original, functional items that fitted into the categories of the exhibition. The aim was to show the delegates from abroad as well as those from South Africa, a

selection of products that reflected both the originality and initiative of South African designers as well as the new cohesion between so-called Third World and First World approaches to design. These aims were seen to be in line with the current RDP (Reconstruction and Development Programme) of the South African government but were by no means a conscious effort to be "politically correct".

The scope of the exhibition was limited to household products. The categories were as follows: Fabrics, carpets, furniture, furniture accessories, tableware, lighting, glass, ceramics, metal and wirework. Owing to the constraints of space and time, the committee decided to concentrate on Cape Town and its environs. However far from being local in the parochial sense of the word the exhibition had a message that was entirely appropriate to all growing nations: That of using what is available to make something that is both lasting and useful.

It was Haldane Martin, one of the designers included in this research project and an exhibitor in the design-craft exhibition, who said that what is now being made in South Africa is representative of a *new craft* (interview 12.4.1994). Martin is particularly inspired to encourage South African designers to use their initiative and make a difference to society. He was elected onto the exhibition committee for his dedication to the spirit of original and meaningful design.

The editorial in the exhibition brochure is quoted in full as it is inextricably linked to this research project:

This exhibition sets out to reflect the coming together of craft and design at a time when South Africa has taken on the challenge of reconciliation. The marriage of the craft techniques with those of design is indicative of the new spirit of inclusiveness.

Craft has traditionally been associated with handmade products that are either one-offs or short runs which are made of natural materials. The craft of William Morris's nineteenth century Arts and Crafts' Movement rejected the mechanized mass-production of the industrial age and looked back to the Spirit of the Gothic and the guilds of the Medieval era. However the craft on this exhibition does not reject the industrial or the current technological age, it moves forward with an eagerness to incorporate all the possibilities that progress offer, while at the same time never losing sight of where origins lie.

This is THE NEW CRAFT. It is time to throw away the shackles of separatism and the elitist categorization of Design versus Craft. The designers who have exhibited on this exhibition do not concern themselves with hierarchical divisions, such an approach holds the shadow of an age to be dispensed with in the history of South Africa. The selected categories proclaim a vivacity that is in line with the Rainbow Nation[15]. The vitality and tension that is tautly evident in much of the furniture

> design, speaks of a new life that has been breathed into South African design, A new life, a new identity and a new craft (1995: Exhibition Brochure).

The exhibition made a worthwhile impression and many encouraging comments were addressed to members of the committee during the conference. In a letter of thanks, the manager of the Design Institute of the SABS wrote that:

> To combine the craft exhibition with a design conference was a carefully considered decision ... you have really excelled and have added a new dimension to our annual conference in a way that will be difficult to exceed (Viljoen 22.3.1995).

THE EXAMPLES: METHODS AND MATERIALS

In order to validate the assertions towards new craft already made in this chapter, the next section of this chapter will focus on examples of the designs themselves. The analysis will focus on the materials used as well as the methods of making. Aspects of style will be dealt with in the following chapter. The examples include furniture, furniture accessories and associated household products. The majority of products to be discussed were on the above exhibition. Those examples included in this research that were not on exhibition would have been, if time and space had permitted it.

Peter Dormer wrote that "...one of the differences that distinguishes the design-led and mass-manufactured object from the craft object, is that the one seeks to disguise the reality of its labour whilst the

other seeks to celebrate it" (1990:31).

Most of the following examples of furniture reveal a celebration of both method and material but this does not necessarily mean that they fall distinctly into a craft category. Dormer's distinction is an oversimplification. Design and craft (in this research project) are joining forces in a new exploration of materials and methods in the examples that follow.

The design group *Greenspace* includes the industrial designers Haldane Martin and Jami Hamlin and architect John Vogel. Haldane Martin's animal shaped compact disc racks in figure 3 made of powder coated and wet sprayed mild steel are an interesting solution to the storage of one of high-technology's latest products. The forms are simple and easy to mass produce. The structure is strong and durable. Martin does not make the racks individually by hand. He designs and develops them in detail. From there he makes full use of the best technology available by approaching and sub-contracting manufacturers who have the appropriate machinery. At no time does he feel alienated from his creation because he is in touch with all the stages. Craft cannot only mean crafting by hand but crafting with the mind as well. Therefore the intellectual aspect (mind-crafting) which has been seen to more a part of design than craft, is now a shared factor between craft and design and this results in the "new craft". Using the word *design* in the place of *new craft*, Martin aligns the design process to the growth of a plant:

"Design is almost like growing a plant, a plant can grow itself you just have to water it. We just water creative ideas" (Interview 30.5.1995).

Jami Hamlin said that *Greenspace* has a fundamental approach to design which necessitates drawing by hand. He said that being a "whizz-kid" on CAD does not suffice. Hamlin said that when you sit down and start working with your hands, there is a direct relationship and communication from your thoughts into your hands and that is when you actually start shaping a far better product (Interview 30.5.1995). Drawing, in this sense is also "handwork", handwork that is essential to the creation of a product that is tactile and full. *Greenspace* plans to aquire computers to work with, but they declare that these will never replace the importance of *drawing*, as Hamlin expressed. Jaques Giard wrote that "The replacement of the machine tool by the computer was analogous to the mind replacing muscle as man's preeminent member. Knowledge had overtaken skills in the industrial world..." (1990:25). However as far as *Greenspace* are concerned, nothing is being "replaced" skills are merely being redefined and adjusted. Replacement suggests obsolescence, a philosophy that is contributing to environmental damage.

As previously stated, in this new craft the method of making is not confined to hand tools and the choice of materials is also not confined to natural materials. "We work with the materials the way they want to be worked with" (Vogel interview 30.5.1995). Vogel said that the materials needed to retain a rawness and an integrity. There is a sense of these designers letting things speak to them and through them. They try to encapsulate a part of the physical energy of the air and earth itself and so imbue a spirit of life into their designs. "We strive for less of a nuts- and- bolts approach to design and more of an expression of the soul" (Martin ibid). "We animate our

designs so that people can really respond to them and grow to love them" (Vogel ibid).

Greenspace's design process involves a loose approach, where they "...try to cut out unnecessary steps" (ibid). They like the projects to grow organically and believe that the best results come from not too much structure.

The furniture can be a combination of materials from plastic composites to mild steel and aluminium. John Vogel's "Kudu Horn" tables are a further example of this. (fig.5) reveal the variety of materials used. The cast aluminium legs are sometimes substituted with coloured resin and galvanized bolts with glass tops. The forms are simple and are only in batch production at the moment, but could quite easily be mass produced. As far as these designers are concerned the use of synthetic materials does not presuppose an immunity to environmental awareness. Quite the contrary.

It needs to be emphasized that green design or environmentally conscious design, is not necessarily design that uses natural materials but design that uses materials and methods that do not deplete or harm natural resources. It is often more harmful to use natural materials than it is to use synthetic ones. The material used needs to be appropriate for the function of the product in the context of its usage. In *Greenspace's* manifesto, they acknowledge the importance of ecology in contemporary society and seek to "... explore the relationships between humanity, technology and ecology" (Appendix A).

From the muddy squatter settlements in and around Cape Town, Sonwaba Soloman resolved his own problems of unemployment as well as one of the problems of the squatter community. He collected scrap metal from the many heaps of refuse in the area and began to make containers which would keep the squatter community's samp, mielie meal and sugar dry. As a craftsperson skilled in his work, he took pride in it and it was therefore beautifully finished. Scouts of the SBDC (Small Business Development Corporation) discovered his activities and offered him workshop space[17]. Soloman subsequently received large orders from corporate companies (fig. 33) and his work is displayed along with other household and furniture accessories in all the outlets that promote the design researched in this dissertation.

The work of John Alsessandri (*Flying Cow* studio in Cape Town) also makes use of found materials in the design of his furniture (figs. 19,20). The designs bear testimony to furniture that has the lasting quality necessary to avoid more waste. Furniture that is certainly not designed to date and discard. This is an alternative technology, an intermediate and appropriate technology in a country that has the complications of "First world" models with "Third world" economic and social realities.

John Alessandri's approach to design combines creativity with ingenuity and resourcefulness. He admits the dilemma of the "artist" who wants a particular material for a particular form but compensates that desire with the "designer" who compromises and uses what is affordable and available:

Alessandri regards the choice of materials as the main challenge in

his career:

> As an artist if I want to use stainless steel I use stainless steel, but as a designer I may be forced to use aluminium or even galvanized metal. As a designer you make aluminum work, as an artist you can't (Interview 30.5.1995).

Lisa Perold (also of the *Flying Cow* group) works with the contrast of wood and metal in as raw a state as possible. She says that she likes to leave visible evidence of hand work by not depatinating for example. Perold says she uses technology such as welding steel components in conjunction with the warmth of the wood and finds that this welding of steel provides the structural combinations that she needs. It is also quick and serves her purpose efficiently. Wood on the other hand has an organic quality which needs nurturing and provides a marked contrast to the steel supports.

Neither Alessandri nor Perold manufacture in large quantities. The forms created in their furniture are either one-off or small batch production. Figure 21 is one of only six. Perold has been asked to make more, but prefers not to repeat a form too much so that she can move on to another project with new shapes and forms. This avoidance of mass manufacturing is not a standpoint against technology in principle but rather a standpoint on aesthetics. Perold says that if she were to mass produce, she would have to design specifically for that. If her present designs were mass produced in industry Perold says that they would lose a lot. The marks of the hand which Perold

refers to as a type of "historic patina" would be impossible to retain in industrial mass production (Interview 30.5.1995).

Metropolis is another design group that are making a unique contribution to furniture design in the Western Cape. The designers involved are two architects: Richard Tremeer and Jon Jakobsen. The furniture produced by *Metropolis* shares the alliance with technology that *Greenspace* has. *Metropolis* and *Greenspace* worked together on a joint project in the *Victoria and Alfred Waterfront* on the Cape Town harbour. The waterfront is full of restored historic buildings as well as postmodern new structures that are in keeping with the old. The designs that these two groups designed were for the BMW bistro in the controversial BMW pavilion building designed by Derik Henstra architects in 1994[18]. The bistro has many of the furniture accessories designed by Greenspace (figs. 14), however the stools, tables and chairs designed by *Metropolis*.

In an interview conducted with *Metropolis*, they put a great deal of emphasis on the amount of "thinking" that goes into their designs. They said that if you look around at the general furniture shops, what you see is standard, and not really thought out. "It is thought out in the sense of mass production and economics in the gross sense" (Jakobsen interview 30.6.1995). *Metropolis* said that the unity of the design lies in the thinking.

As far as materials are concerned, *Metropolis* said that it is not the material that influences the design, but rather the concept and the point of departure. However they believe in expressing the materials

that they use. "We don't try to hide what we are using, for example chipboard" (*Metropolis* ibid). In the storage unit (fig. 13) the edges of the MDF (Medium Density Fibre board) drawers are left exposed.

Simple materials like 3.2 mm diameter steel rod which can be hand bent, form the structure of the lamp in fig 8. The paper used is a local handmade "Rivereed" paper. This paper is easily replaced with any other non-acid paper.

Pressed plywood to which they apply a veneer facing is often used by *Metropolis* (fig. 13). They also often use standard components (available for the upholstery industry) as opposed to made up pieces. Jakobsen said that they like the challenge of using what is available. This approach to materials ties in with *Metropolis'* conceptual base which is one of thoughtful compromise in order to offer the best solution. (See figs. 8-14).

When asked about their attitudes to mass production, *Metropolis* were extremely positive. Richard Tremeer said that they do design with mass production in mind although they do not have the use of a factory available to them. "It would be nice to share what we have done on a mass production level. A lot of people out there would benefit" (ibid). This attitude presupposes that quality is not necessarily lost in mass production.

Metropolis design for people who like well designed furniture but who cannot afford expensive items, and people who are not catered for in the general, mainstream culture. They try to provide aesthetically

and functionally well designed products that are accessible to people. It is this approach to reach out and influence the quality of people's lives that is reminiscent of William Morris. However it could be admirably achieved if put into mass production.

Metalo is another small operation that combines well with the *Metropolis* approach. *Metalo* has its own commercial outlet bearing this name and it is here that quite a few *Metropolis* designs are also on display, *Metalo* also manufacture some items for *Metropolis*.

Marcus Louw, who designs for *Metalo* openly admits that materials influence his designs. He said that the design evolves from the materials rather than the other way around. Louw chooses metal because he feels that although it is very hard it is also incredibly versatile. The table in fig 15 reveals the intentional lack of clean finish which is evident in so many of the designs illustrated in this dissertation.

The work of architect Gary Cotterel, member of *The Image Police* (the name of the design group to which he belongs) reveals an innovative combination of resin, upholstery and metal (fig. 26). Jacki Filmer's (an independent Cape Town designer) *Tub Chair* (fig.25) which is made of galvanized metal which communicates on an extremely basic level. Inspite of the very strong stylistic content, the material and "unfinished" method of construction of the tub chair dominate any interpretation of the chair.

The design groups and individuals that are focused on in this

dissertation all have a number of products that are made of various types of metal. The work of *Montebello Smithy*, Conrad Hicks, is an example of the ancient craft of the blacksmith combining with the contemporary interpretations of form and function. Hicks said that he has chosen to work in steel alone and this material is therefore central to his design. With reference to the substance of steel, he said: "... people perceive steel to be hard but it is actually very soft when it is hot" (interview 30.6.1995). As a result, Conrad Hicks likes render to fluid lines in his steel forms so that the rods look like liquid steel as opposed to the perception of the hard intractable quality of steel. "That is what is so interesting, you can change peoples visual perceptions about the steel" (ibid).

However Hicks said that he is neither a traditionalist nor a purist. He likes to play with forms using a power hammer as well as an arc hammer. Traditional blacksmiths did not have oxy-acetylene and power hammers. They devised methods of joining and welding, using rivets which Hicks admitted are very pleasing. However he also believes that these traditional methods are not the only way. Hicks believes that all methods that are accessible should be experimented with, this includes laser cutting which is available in Johannesburg at present. The seven-ton power hammer in Hicks' workshop is a dominating force in the manipulation of the metal with which he identifies. A combination of sheet steel and different thicknesses of rod are twisted and shaped to take on forms that give the metal new life (fig. 17).

In a recent advertisement in the British *Journal of Landscape Design*,

a similar approach to the craft of the blacksmith is referred to. The work of the "Artist Blacksmith" is promoted:

> The term 'artist blacksmith' is used to distinguish designer craftsmen in iron from industrial blacksmiths and farriers. Designer smiths are skilled technicians who work creatively and offer details and designs of their own (1995:36).

The creativity involved in the work of the designers included in this research is combined with a realistic and *appropriate,* approach to technology. An appropriate or intermediate technology is not exclusive to South Africa and is seen to be the answer to the problems of all developing countries. The *Journal of Design History* featured an article entitled: "Confronting Real Problems: Cross-cultural design and Intermediate Technology in Schools":

> The problems of gathering information are particularly acute in intermediate technology. This specific branch of appropriate technology which focuses on fitting design to the local cultural, economic, and social needs of developing countries. To assess the needs of these cultures, accurate information is essential - what appears obvious is not necessarily so in other countries. Deeply rooted stereotypes of 'them' and 'us' get in the way of finding an appropriate design solution (Mulberg 1993: 209).

Finally in support of propagating the idea that there is indeed a *New Craft Movement* in Western Cape furniture design, the principle of teamwork needs to be assessed in terms of the design groups that have been discussed in this chapter. Teamwork in the new craft does not presuppose work in Gothic Guilds (twelth to fourteenth centuries) which involved the practice of working under a mastercraftsman as an apprentice. The essence of what has become known as *ubunthu*[19] in South African politics is a vital ingredient in the success of any enterprise. This is democracy in its truest form, where the thoughts and aspirations of every one of the workers in the group are considered seriously. However an extension of this type of teamwork in terms of craft involves an interaction with the forms and materials themselves. It is this holistic interaction that is indicative of a new craft.

Eldon Katter, professor of Art Education and Crafts at Kutztown University, cites Staub's views on craft which emphasise this interaction":

> ... an inherent connectedness between or among an object and its maker and its perceiver. Craft forms are the result of the merger of people and materials. Craft records the interaction of human beings with each other and with their culture. Craft represents the work of individuals who are connected to communities (1995:9).

This "connectedness" is a sharing of ideas and a mutual tapping of resources. The emphasis on the combination of thought and work is

evident in all design groups in this research. Members of the groups draw from each other in order to create with fullness.

Such connectedness also serves the point that this craft is non-individualist *within* the inherent and ambitious individualism of capitalism. The new craft movement in furniture (and other product design) can be argued to be far more resilient to the tests and pressures of capitalism, as a result of an approach that is part of a communal thought base. African society[20] has been traditionally based on a community spirit as opposed to an individualistic one. This factor is influential in the formulation of new policies in the new South Africa.

The phenomenon of connectedness is not unique to South Africa and is mirrored in other areas such as Great Britain, Italy, Germany and America. It is not the object of this research to argue for uniqueness but rather to argue that these new craft approaches solve very real problems of economic growth in the new South Africa.

There are other furniture makers in Cape Town who do not follow the same path (or principles) of the new craft. By way of comparison, figure 42 shows examples of *Roger Young's* work which is crafted in the same way as the "old" Arts and Crafts Movement of William Morris. Young works from his home studio and makes everything individually by hand. His work is labour intensive and time consuming. The results are highly priced unique pieces of exquisitely crafted furniture.

On the other hand the *Wunders Furniture Factory* in Cape Town (fig.43) consciously and deliberately copies overseas trends in order to cater to a sector of the consumer market that still wishes to emulate European style. Materials are imported wherever necessary, as using available resources is not a priority for *Wunders*.

Chapter Two sought to reveal the various examples of work and methods of production in such a way that similarities of approach between the groups would be evident in order to substantiate that there is indeed a new craft initiative in Western Cape furniture design. After establishing this fact, chapter two then sought to argue that the methods and material used are relevant and applicable to the needs of the new South Africa as it moves ahead with post apartheid social and economic reconstruction. This leads into chapter three which takes the discussion on methods and materials further in order to establish stylistic attributes.

SECTION B.

STYLE AND IDENTITY

CHAPTER THREE

A CONTEXTUALIZATION OF STYLE AND IDENTITY IN THE "NEW SOUTH AFRICA"

Interpretations of craft methods in terms of what is perceived to be old and what is perceived to be new, leads this research to an analysis of style. *Time* and *place* will serve as the basis for contextualization of style in this chapter.

THE MEANING OF *STYLE*

Monni Adams wrote that "style as strategy" is the dominant intellectual paradigm of art historical scholarship (1989:57). Style is also important as a barometer in design history and theory. *Style can be considered to be a particular manner of working and a* particular use of visual language including that of line, form, proportion, colour and scale. The way in which these formal factors are worked into the function and materials of the furniture, produces what is visible at the end of the process.

Before assessing the stylistic attributes of the examples selected for this dissertation, the meaning of style needs further investigation. Shapiro (1953) wrote that reference to *style* serves *different purposes. Three of the main purposes, as put forward by*

Shapiro, are as follows:

1. Style as a motive or pattern may be studied for diagnostic purposes rather than for its own sake. In art historical terms, it may be used as a criterion for date, place and origin as well as the identification of a particular religious, social or moral group.

2. Style as a value term, a quality outside the scope of historical and ethnological studies. As such Shapiro suggests that a *style-less* art would be termed weak or decadent.

3. Style as a *period style*, in this instance Shapiro says that "... every style is peculiar to a **period** of a culture" (Philipson and Gudel 1980:138). It would appear that what Shapiro is suggesting here is that style is located in time. "Works in the style of one time could not have been produced in another" (ibid). He connects style with place as he links *style, culture* and *place* together. "The style is therefore used with confidence as an independent clue to the time and place of origin of a work ..." (cited by Philipson and Gudel 1980:139).

With reference to Shapiro's second explanation of style, style as a value term in *design* is viewed in a different light. In design, style is the 'handwriting' or semantic detailing of the work. If a design is regarded as style-less then (in modernist terms) the design is seen as a strong design. Even in postmodernism, style as a value assessment is unconvincing if separated from the function of the product.

Shapiro also referred to Paul Frankl as well as Riegl and Löwy's theories on style: Frankl conceived a model that combined a polar structure with a cyclic structure. He postulated that there is a recurrent movement between the two poles of style: a style of Being and a style of Becoming. Within these styles Frankl said there are three stages: a preclassic, a classic and a post-classic.

Shapiro writes that Riegl saw the possibility of closed cycles within the cyclic structure. The examples used and quoted by Shapiro have the benefit of extensive hindsight and it was consequently possible for these theorists to see cyclic, polar and closed cycles of development. It is the purpose of this chapter to assess the stylistic features of the selected designs against the background of the British Arts and Crafts Movement, as well as the history of the Western Cape.

The stylistic developments revealed in this chapter have more in common with a cyclic development than a polar or linear development. A cyclic development which recalls the past craft practices without paying strict allegiance to them. This view of style approaches the postmodern reading of style which is found to be more appropriate as a form of analysis.

If a design has a recognizable style then it can be identified, which in turn may mean that the design has its own identity. Identity is therefore conflated with style which in turn is conflated with meaning. Style is not just a result of working with materials in a particular way. The style develops out of the connection between

thought and material. The thought is based on the concept, which is embedded in a time and place. Time and place provide the context for any analysis. The designs that form the body of this research are situated in Cape Town in the era that immediately succeeds the demise of Apartheid rule in South Africa. The time that is commonly known as post-election South Africa or the "New South Africa".

A HISTORICAL SURVEY OF A LOCAL DESIGN STYLE

In order to put the style of the Western Cape's new craft into perspective, it is necessary to take a brief look at the styles that existed before. In the various written histories of South Africa, the Southern tip of Africa, which is in the province of the Western Cape, has featured prominently. It was here that the Khoisan hunter-gatherers and pastoralists were met by the colonialists in the seventeenth century (Worden 1994:6). The Khoisan crafts were in tune with their absolute dependence upon nature for survival (fig. 34). Furniture (as it is understood today) was not necessary for the Khoi's survival, skins and reed mats were used to sit and sleep upon. Eating receptacles were made of toughened hide and ostrich shells, these people did not burden themselves with possessions as they were in constant search for better grazing as well as hunting grounds. The bantu-speaking people who settled in the North and East of the country established more lasting craft practices such as carved wooden implements and ceramics[23]. However as the bantu-speaking people were some distance from the Western Cape, they had no direct influence on the craft and design of furniture in the early settled communities of the Western Cape.

The early Dutch settlers brought furniture of the Dutch Baroque style from Holland as well as furniture accessories from the east, to the Cape (figs. 35,36,40). The Cape was initially used as a resting place for sailors of the Dutch East India trading company (V.O.C.). Many of the company employees subsequently became "free burghers" and started independent lives in the colony (Fransen 1982: 84). It is with these people that a style which was more indigenous to the Cape itself began to evolve. Fransen wrote that Cape cabinet makers and silversmiths began to simplify the European baroque style. The Cape furniture of the "Dutch Period" (1652-1806) developed into a style of simplicity and solidity (figs.39). A style that was in keeping with the hardships and endurance of existing in a land that was deemed to be untamed.

The imaginative skill of the Malay slaves who had been imported to the colony as labour, also contributed to the design style of the Western Cape. Therefore what developed was to be a hybrid style that was made of a combination of cultures over period of time.

The "English Period" (1806-1948) saw the borrowing and adaptation of the English Victorian style. This was particularly evident in the architecture. The solid steps and simple columns of the Cape Dutch "stoep", which was the Dutch solution to the African sun, contrasted with the English veranda's Victorian wrought iron filigree work (fig. 41). Whatever the adaptations, the new terrain and climate had to be coped with in a sensible way. It was this down-to-earth type of design that rooted itself into an indigenous Western Cape design style.

In spite of the existence of local craft furniture. Local identity in furniture design was not a matter of pride for immigrant or colonial South Africans. In the Dutch and British periods the majority of immigrants chose to import furniture from England and Europe rather than buy locally made pieces which were regarded as inferior. During the British period the fierce nationalist spirit of Lady Florence Phillips combined with the serious research of Dorothea Fairbridge, served to encourage the support of local design and manufacture. Both Lady Phillips and Dorothea Fairbridge believed that South Africa needed to establish its own style. Fairbridge had begun her research into the Cape archives "... to discover all that lay behind the buildings and objects that the National Society sought to preserve" (Gutsche 1966:186). Strong national feelings for the new country inspired such people to seek out its history, in order to preserve and continue in the formation of an individual identity for South African design. Lady Phillips said that "In agreeing to shelter under the power of the British Empire, the old republics [of South Africa] would completely lose their identities, their very souls" (Gutsche 1966;195).

Most of the capitalist leaders lived in Johannesburg, the financial centre of the country. Lord Phillips, president of Corner House and an executive of the Chamber of Mines as well as member of parliament gave extensive financial support to his wife Lady Phillips' ideals on national design identity. She had been inspired by Baker's translation of Morris's aesthetic into the South African situation and had commissioned Herbert Baker to build her own Johannesburg house "Arcadia" in 1910 as well. The interior and furniture of this

house were proof of her earnestness to promote local craft and furniture making:

> ... Baker ordained and Florrie insisted that everything possible about the house should be of local design, material and manufacture. At a time when local artists and craftsmen were still disparaged, their joint eccentricity was of estimable value to the struggling band of worthy exponents
> (Gutsche 1966:237).

Lady Phillips then made her largest contribution to the encouragement of South African design by organizing a LARGE Arts and Crafts' exhibition in 1910.

> Artists, craftsmen and cultured members of the community were for the first time brought together in a common aim and made conscious of the artistic possibilities and cultural needs of the country
> (Gutsche 1966:248).

This exhibition featured Cape furniture as well as furniture made in the north.

The lack of faith and belief in the South African design continued into the era of the Nationalist Apartheid government (1948-1993). Eclecticism was prevalent and if imported European furniture could not be afforded then replicas and eclectic versions were bought in preference to the purchase of a locally made and designed items. The label "imported" created a halo effect around products from Western

countries. South Africans took no pride in their own country. The 1980s which represented a time of terrible political strife in South Africa was also a time when the hi-tech styles of Europe were ostentatiously displayed in furniture showrooms.

The topic of this dissertation is restricted to the Western Cape which excludes the discussion of a *South African* style. This is a subject that requires further extensive research. As mentioned previously, style is determined by place, however it is impossible to write about a Western Cape style or identity without considering the broader context of the entire country.

A SENSE OF *PLACE*

It can be accepted that the Western Cape lifestyle in the nineteenth century, was far easier than that of frontier farmers or the mining communities in the North of the country. The Western Cape with Cape Town as its centre, established an infrastructure that even the immigrants considered civilized (Gutsche 1966:290). It was established as the cultural centre of the country, which put an early emphasis on aesthetics in this region. The mining north was seen to be the area of materialist enterprise, where the fight was for quick and immediate wealth, over and above the quality of life. This discrepancy can be argued to exist today although loyal Johannesburgers will fiercely defend the cultural aesthetic of their large industrial city.

Cape Town is regarded as a softer city than Johannesburg, the Western Cape has a slower pace of life when compared to that of Johannesburg.

The Cape is said to have unparalleled scenic beauty, with mountain ranges reaching out along the peninsula as well as into the wine-lands. This is coupled with beautifully formed beaches (illustration cover page). There is much that attracts young South African designers to the Western Cape, where there is the space and time to create. "The more freedom we have the better we design" (Hamlin interview 30.5.1995). Martin also referred to the joy of being able to walk on the mountain when mentally working through a design problem. Walks in the many mountain reserves on the peninsula are an inspiration for Martin's designs. The "lizard" CD rack was taken up the mountain to be photographed in its "natural habitat" (fig. 3) (Martin interview 12. 4. 1994).

Perold said that part of the magic of Cape Town is that it is becoming more cosmopolitan. "What is important to me is that people must know that Cape Town has good design as opposed to having a mark of being made in Cape Town" (interview 30.6.1995). Design identity is more the spirit of the place rather than an exterior recognizability. If things are generated out of the spirit of the place ... it they are fully engaged with what they are making, a design identity could emerge" (ibid).

In defining "place" Dr. Estelle Maré of the Department of Art History at UNISA, said that place is "... a location of experience, the container of shapes, power and feelings" (1994 unpublished proceedings of the SAAAH conference). Maré referred to Nobert Schültz's definition of place as an "existential anchor or foothold"

(ibid). The psychological associations that the designers have with their environment must influence the designs that they say come from within themselves. The sense of "place" is internalized and processed into the design just as other significant experiences are.

FROM ECLECTICISM TO ESSENTIALISM

The past two decades in the country of South Africa represented a time when confidence in a South African identity was sorely lacking. This resulted in a paucity of original furniture design with major stores importing designs from Italy, France and Germany. Tubular steel, leather and glass pervaded the ongoing culture of Bauhaus Modernism. This importation of an austerely finished style, inculcated a foreign set of stylistic standards in a design community that lacked motivation. Cape Town was no exception and local manufacturers continued to copy overseas designs.

Now, in the "New" South Africa headed by President Nelson Mandela and the government of National Unity[22], it could be said that it is time to formulate a new and real identity for South Africa design. European eclecticism can be discarded in favour of local incentives for a style which can be recorded in South African design history. However a style is not created in a vacuum and it is possible that one brand of eclecticism may be discarded for another. If the European cloak is unscrupulously and unthinkingly replaced by the African variety, it is obvious that a superficial style will result. A certain degree of eclecticsm is necessary at

this period in history, too much precedes and exists at present, to ignore it and start completely afresh. Drewal wrote that eclecticsm is a "pragmatic" approach to style and theory because of its inclusiveness (1987:32). It is the view of this author that to include particular design features with careful consideration is a cultural act. To absorb an experience and integrate it into a work of design is a cultural admission. What is created is design as cultural artefact. An artefact that can be a determining influence in the creation of a local or national identity.

The existence of a new craft movement as a determining factor in the establishment of an identity for local Western Cape furniture design will also be significant on a national scale. However design history must be aware that preempting this situation is not without its dangers. The art historian and critic E.H. Gombrich (1960) wrote that:

> A style, like a culture or climate of opinion, sets up a horizon of expectation, a mental set, which registers deviations and modifications with exaggerated sensitivity. In noticing relationships the mind registers tendencies (Gombrich 1960:52).

In South Africa today there are indeed many expectations and there is an entire *band-wagon* of ethnicity which if superficially co-opted into a style does more damage to the establishment of an identity than good. The "mental set" which Gombrich refers to, can in the case of South African stylistic identity be reflected in the damaging practice of *essentialism* which is rife in descriptions of what is, or

is not "South African". Within these dangerous constraints of esssentialism, terms such as *raw, traditional, ethnic, tribal* and others are used without adequate substantiation. The essentialist tendency of a hegemonic cultural (white capitalists) group often imposes stylistic considerations which can merely serve to appease the conscience and make up the gap after years of not recognizing the rich cultural diversity of the South African people. This question of superficial co-option is central to this thesis.

Essentialist signifiers (such as raw, unrefined, rough, ethnic) could also be borrowed by overseas design scouts. Carrie Curzon of the Sunday Times (1992) wrote that Pentagram partners said that "The emerging new South Africa is on the threshold of a breakthrough in creative design" (1992:39). Merwyn Kurlansky, a Pentagram partner based in London was quoted as saying:

> The country is in the throes of a real creative breakthrough. Until now the tendency has been to look to Europe or the USA for inspiration. But that is changing, designers overseas are likely to start searching for ideas here. There is tremendous talent and ability in this country, and there are already a lot of people who are persuing African elements in their work. Still, though a few have been winning awards abroad, on the whole the political situation here has meant limited exposure. Now things are starting to open up (ibid).

It will not be the first time that the West has looked to Africa for inspiration. Picasso did at the beginning of the century and that

changed the direction of Western art[23]. However surely South Africa as a physical part of Africa is far better placed to form a style from this continent?

To return to the problem of essentialism, Lize Van Roebbroeck of the Department of Art History at UNISA wrote that:

> The idea that an innate "Africaness" infuses "black art" with a particular, recognisable aesthetic apparently exercised power over the imaginations over white critics ... (1993:51).

As such Van Robbroeck said that an essentialist viewpoint needs careful deconstruction. The appropriation of an essential African or Zulu or Xhosa quality in an artefact or object is a generalization of stylistic phenomena. Such attributes have to be historically proven.

DIVERSITY AS OPPOSED TO HOMOGENEITY

It must be stressed that extensive research into African art and artifacts has revealed that there was not and is not, tribal insularity in African design. "African art is neither enormously unitary nor irremediably diverse: it arises from a coherent pluralism" (Kerchache et al. 1993:26). Paula Ben Amos wrote that the view that African societies are highly integrated and slow to change has hindered understanding and impeded accurate research (1989:3). In attempting to arrive at the best methodology for research into African art and artifacts, Paudrat advocates comparative aesthetics: "The choice of comparativism and its orientation permits the

discovery that there is a good distance between a universalism that ignores, underestimates, or dissolves differences and a relativism that accentuates them" (Kerchache et al. 1993:25). All African societies have been subject to influence, in the east the dominant influence was that of Islam and in the South the influences were from missionaries and colonists together with intertribal connections. Therefore to label the product of one society as having innate qualities of that particular society is to assume that society was without influence, which is historically impossible.

It is therefore with due circumspection that the concept of a new and *real stylistic identity* for Western Cape as well as South African design should be approached. In any case style cannot exist on its own, consumption and production are determining factors. Production was dealt with in chapter two and consumption will be dealt with in chapter four. However it is also useful to temporarily extract style from these two important determinants in order to discover a possible *zeitgeist*.

In Shapiro's comprehensive discussion on style (1953) he wrote of the possibility of style being crystallized into a common "convention" which is then accepted by designers [in this case] as well as the public "... because it satisfies a *need* [my italics] and is adequate to a special problem ..." (Philipson and Gudel 1980:166). In the context of this dissertation it may therefore be suggested that the emergence of a new style is certainly fulfilling a social and psychological need amongst South Africans who have for so long been relegated to the consciously marginal site of non-categorization.

In extreme terms, to enter the arena of categorization is to run the risk of being put into a box and labelled. What is required is not entrapment beneath pseudo packaging, but acknowledgment. Acknowledgement can only be possible if there is design that communicates something different and establishes a relationship worthy of recognition. Another look at the examples chosen for this research will hopefully offer the possibility of such a relationship.

STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF EXAMPLES

The work of John Alessandri (figs. 19,20) has a presence. A presence embodies an identity. When questioned on the identity and style of his work, Alessandri said it was difficult to pinpoint identity in his own work although he did believe in identity as such. Alessandri emphasises the power of the subconscious line and brings the approach of the artist together with the approach of the designer. He said that "... being an artist is also being a designer" (interview 30.6.1995). According to Alessandri the art is the growth and the design is the completed form (ibid). This opinion was also the opinion of Richard Hamilton[24] in the 1960s. Evamy wrote that Hamilton believed the designers' creative freedom was valuable to the product and quoted Hamilton as saying that the designer "... feels he is a creative artist" (1994:14).

Alessandri admitted to be being stylistically influenced by Africa but not in a direct way. "Africa is not necessarily little triangles and geometrics, all cultures have these, it is how they are put together... I try to deconstruct this and go beyond it to discover the roots..." (ibid). An avoidance of African essentialism is present

in all the designers selected for this research. It is this steering clear of easily identifiable labels that gives the work a distinction which separates it from the curio- craft- market style (fig. 32). Yet the avoidance of the so-called "African style", which may include mask-like stylization or the repetition of geometric shapes etched into their materials, was not a conscious avoidance. The style of the designers in this research is as a result of the fact that they look within themselves and not only outside of themselves.

Lisa Perold said that the identity of her work is a mix between African and Western. Perold stressed the importance of her relationship with her client, saying that she created a chair (for example) so that the client could say that is "my" chair. Perold said that in designing a chair for a client, she is creating a throne for the sitter. The feeling of creating a functional form that has a part of the person within it, determines and shapes the consciousness of the sitter. The style of Perold is therefore partly dependent on the relationships that exist between herself as maker and the client as receiver (figs. 22,23,24).

The furniture and accessories of the BMW Pavilion that formed a combined project of *Greenspace* and *Metropolis*, reveals none of the Victorian history of the colonial Victoria and Alfred waterfront. It would appear that in this context, their styles do leap ahead into the future as they are surrounded by other styles that purposefully recall a past century.

A stylistic analysis of the work of *Metropolis* reveals what Martin

termed a "brutal" quality. The "Brutalism"[25] of Late Modernism is part of architectural history. It was noted for the uncompromising treatment of materials (such as concrete) for what they were. When this approach is applied to the synthesized materials of the industrial and technological age, a greater awareness of teh new materials is created.

The "Tub chair" designed by independent designer, Jacki Filmer has a powerful association with the galvanized baths that the African people use for their washing (fig. 25). The image of the womenfolk bent over these baths scrubbing clothes in yards early in the morning is strangely assimilated into an avant-garde chair. The tub is a part of African life, now sliced into a chair. Filmer admits to being stimulated by Starck's "Coste's chair" saying that the "Tub chair" is "... a rough contextual version of Phillipe Starck's Coste's chair" (Rosenberg 1995:28). The meaning becomes confused with African scrubbing and Starckian wit. A strange cultural mix.

"SAVAGE INTELLECT, MODERN LIVES"

The above heading is the subtitle of Marianna Torgovinick's seminal publication on the interpretation of Western versus non-Western. Torgovnick's writing is particularly relevant after assessing the style of the preceding examples from a largely formalist viewpoint. Torgovnick referred to the "them", "us" dichotomy, explaining that "us/we" represents the western illusion of powerful unity (1990:4). The "us" in this scenario is the monolithic vertical against which all "Other" is assessed. The postmodern Other is represented by

"them". Torgovnick wrote that postmodernism is obessesed with the "primitive" (1990:21).

This viewpoint is significant in terms of the assimilation of what could be considered "African" design features into the examples included in this thesis. Is the inclusion of that which is African within an African province, serving the purpose of global postmodernism? Is there not a "them" within all of "us"? And is not this the postmodern search[26]?

These questions are posed in order to position the stylistic analysis within the postmodern paradigm, which is in line with the unity of purpose that this thesis strives to prove.

A GLOBAL STYLE WITHIN POSTMODERNISM?

The sculptural forms and direct approach to materials is not exclusive to South African furniture design. Similar shapes are apparent in the work of French designer Phillipe Starck. Startling lines and innovative forms are part of a postmodern initiative to continue experimenting. The influence of the deconstruction of Derrida and Eisenmann affected the established norms of spatial distribution in interior and furniture design. As the wave of deconstructive theory made itself felt in most academic disciplines in the 1980s it is not surprising that Ron Arad and Gaetano Pesce (who even earlier) began producing chairs and tables that question their very function (fig. 28). Some are playful and some are disconcertingly serious, all have an undisclosed agenda.

The South African 1990s could be said to be tiring of experimentation as there is no more time to flirt with functional design. Although many of the shapes that are present in the design of this research could be labelled postmodern because of particular associations and references that are not directly related to function, this is still *not design for design sake.*

The shift from playful postmodernism to realistic design that does not revert to the sterility of modernism is also evident overseas. The American edition of *Vogue* featured an article entitled "Double duty: with space at a premium, designers are creating furniture with split personalities" (Bowles 1993:296). This article followed the 1993 ICFF (International Contemporary Furniture Fair) held annually in New York.

Such an economic approach to design could be a global style as opposed to a national style. There are many complications associated with attributing the style of a particular design group or individual to that of the country or even city to which they belong.

The move towards globalism is indeed strong in international design and it must be difficult for practitioners in the design world to resist this move. Eldon Katter argues for an education in a " ... global age [that] calls for a new look at our collective pasts and a greater concern for our collective futures" (Katter 1995:9). This attitude moves away from the territorial seeking of identity, whether national or individual.

Professor Marion Sauthoff of the department of Information Design at the University of Pretoria wrote that Alexis Wadman (industrial designer in Johannesburg), " ... does not believe that there is room for anything like a South African style. For him, there is a world style and an international consumer aesthetic" (1993:26). Wadman used the Japanese example of appropriating Western standards before it could "...afford to impose its own view and introduce an oriental flavour into consumer durables and mass merchandising items "(ibid).

By equating image with style as a visually recognisable factor, a shifting from stylelessness to identifiable style is indicative of postmodernism.

Michael Evamy wrote:

> The liberating influence on industrial design of post-modernism has been unmistakable: the power of the visual image of a product has been exploited by manufacturers the world over. But the result has been that the designer is reconfirmed in the minds of many in industry as a purveyor of image only, unable to be trusted with anything serious like engineering (Evamy 1994:14).

The above interpretation of style can be used to denigrate its worth. For example the word "styling" frequently refers to superficial visual or cosmetic details. This dissertation has focused on furniture design which, with the exception of the lighting examples and hot-tray (figs. 8.10) does not require "below-the-line" or engineering aspects. That places even more emphasis on the image

itself. However the image is not independent of the function it would be a shame for manufacturers and engineers to pass off innovative design as image seeking devices. Evamy refers to the lack of faith in designers' abilities to work with industry in order to increase productivity and quality of life as a result of renewed recognition of style but not at the expense of function. Evamy quotes Charles Owen, director of the Design Processes Laboratory at Illinois Institute of Technology:

> It is arguable that the post-modern decades of denouncement set the design professions back two decades. Solid but slow progress in convincing industry and society that design could contribute to higher productivity, better function and improved quality of life was eclipsed almost overnight by the image of designers as whimsical artisans (cited by Evamy 1994:14).

Again the hierarchical judgement of skill versus knowledge or craft versus engineering design rears its head. The manufacturing industry should not be blind to the realities of combining efficiency with effectiveness. A product will not be fully utilized if it is not fully appreciated.

Evamy referred to the "vibrant experimental design culture" that the Netherlands have, where he wrote that "...the confusion over whether design serves better art or business is avoided" (1994:15). However in South Africa, a country that has been built of, and damaged by hierarchy and division, the subject of separation is not merely academic. The style and expression of cultural values, and a coming

together of these, is not only exciting as seen in the furniture discussed, but also vital as part of the process of reinforcing South Africans with a sense of combined selfhood and *zeitgeist*. A faith in what South Africans are and where they come from. This is not image alone and it is certainly not function alone. Such a synthesis can only be achieved by union of thought and spirit. In this scenario, style is a sign and a symbol. It is both the signifier and the signified.

To return to the central hypothesis of this thesis, it is asserted that the new craft is a solution to the problems of (stylistic) identity in South Africa and particularly this craft's implementation of combined technologies within the production of the products. Evamy wrote that the designer's role could become more of a cultural and intellectual one:

> The best thing designers could do for the world is to become the forces within organizations that kick off new positive trains of thought about technology, consumption and the environment. These issues, which transcend style and image, would be an ideal rallying point for designers and become the basis for a more focused definition of design (1994:16).

This is precisely what the designers that form the body of this research are doing. They may not be part of large organizations, but it is historically the grass-roots activities that are the forces of change in any transition.

Chapter three has traversed particular meanings of style and the

significance of these meanings and interpretations to the practical examples of this thesis. The problems of global versus national style, as well as the problems of essentialism and ethnic co-option within national limits highlight the difficulties that exist. However in conclusion it can be ascertained that apart from the dilemmas of direction, the designers included in this research support the new spirit of the age in South Africa.

The search continues into the following chapter which includes a vital aspect in the determining of identity, that of consumption and the marketing which drives it within the new South Africa.

CHAPTER FOUR

MARKETING AND POLITICS AS DETERMINING FORCES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF IDENTITY.

The seeking of identity in the style of Africa, has been an issue for many decades in many areas and disciplines of research. Archaeologists Thaw, Sinclair et al. wrote that "... archaeology is one means of collection, interpretation and transmission of historical information in specific social contexts ..." (1993:428). However they stress that the frame of reference must be susceptible to discussion. It is this frame of reference that creates the criteria for research. Research into identity within the national framework of a new nation may also be subject to the political stance of the researcher. These editors ask: "What is the object of study? For whom? What emphasis should be placed on which set of meanings embedded in material culture? " (ibid). These are not only archaeological questions, research into stylistic identity is a socio-political endeavour incorporating nationalism, internationalism and consumption.

In the light of the above questions, this chapter assesses the implications of marketing and politics upon design identity.

MARKETING, STANDARDS AND RESPONSIBILITY

Marketing can be considered to be part of the design process. Products are made to be sold and used. These two factors are central

to the styling of the product. The previous chapter presented styling as the process which produced the identity.
However it is also arguable that the identity is shaped by marketing forces which include the powerful voice of the media.

In economic language, the market is comprised of consumers. However in reality society is comprised of people. The people are divided into groups or "market sectors" and a hierarchy of buying power is created. Those lower down the ladder aspire to climb higher, this climb is assisted by advertising and hire-purchase facilities. The rise in material status is accompanied hand in hand by a rise in inflation.

Rising inflation will have a serious impact on the South African economy, but if designers continue to make use of available resources and combine technologies to improvise solutions, economic and social growth will result. Friedman wrote that the only cure for inflation is a reduction in monetary growth (1980:271).

Greenspace actually went so far as to draw up a manifesto which attests to their confident spirit and serves as a marketing tool (Appendix A). The manifesto stresses an holistic approach to design which is sensitive to human, technological and ecological needs. The tone of the manifesto is full of positive energy, it calls for a greater sense of responsibility in design:

> We believe that South Africa has the opportunity of becoming the world leader in the production and exporting of simple consumer products. We can see this happening

> with manufacturers and designers making it their social responsibility to ensure that these products contribute meaningfully to our new evolving lifestyles (Appendix A).

Two major issues are raised here, one is standard and the other is responsibility. The designs shown in the examples of this dissertation reveal that the *standard* of furniture and furniture accessory design is arguably on a par with designs shown at the various international furniture fairs over the past few years. *Greenspace*, Gary Cotterel and Conrad Hicks exhibited at the 1994 International Contemporary Furniture Fair in New York where they were well received and established important commercial contacts. Martin said that the response to their work was that it had a freshness that was lacking in other exhibits (Interview August 1994).

The question of *responsibility* echoes of Morris, Marx and Ruskin. However this is not only a "traditional" craft issue. Alexander Manu, the Rumanian born Canadian designer and member of the ICSID board said that in reviewing the state of design a number of things came to mind, and on the positive side one was:

> A renewed social and environmental awareness, responsibility, a possible renaissance of the designer as an independent creator, responsible to society and not subservient to marketing whims" (Manu 1995:1).

"Marketing whims" as Manu put it, suggest a fickle, irresolute force. However the market is a human factor. The various types of markets

are filled with people who have not had design education. All these uninformed people are extremely vulnerable to unscrupulous advertising and promotion.

The previous chapter dealt with some of the problems in terms of formulating a national design identity. This chapter puts forward the point that it is the designers' responsibility to answer to their own people and not be seduced by the bright lights of commercial success in overseas countries. This is not to say that export is not beneficial, however the manufacturing should as far as possible be done in South Africa in order to keep the capital in this country where it is sorely needed.

DESIGN AWARENESS

An editorial entitled "Why South Africa should educate for better design", advocates design courses as a compulsory part of the training curriculum for managers. In this editorial Annie Hay conveyed the views of Professor Peter Gorb who pioneered the introduction of design education as an additional course into the United Kingdom MBA programme in 1975.

> ... design is not just a superficial creation of visual images, it is a management resource ... because design adds value to products. ... An interest in and a care and concern for artifacts characterises design attitudes, these attitudes do not come easily to the well educated Westerner. Most of them (and business school students are certainly among them) are influenced by a culture which gives precedence to ideas over artifacts, to concepts

> rather than things practical and the spiritual rather than the material
> (Hay 1992:22).

Alexander Manu combines the importance of ideas and things practical, into a wonderful union of function when he said that design itself must not lose sight of the "Big Idea". For example the coffee-set must not take precedence over the drinking of coffee, which is an "experience" and an "event" of social warmth and interaction. "By losing sight of the purpose we have destroyed the social meaning of our artifacts" (1995:3).

Therefore if the purpose and ideals could be shared by business managers and designers alike, more responsible design would be produced. Business has been impervious to this alliance for many years. In 1983 South African designer, Ken Godfrey (who is now a senior lecturer in interior and industrial design at the Cape Technikon) was quoted as saying:

> There are numerous misconceptions about design among top managements which have obscured its real value. The first is that design is a mysterious art not related to sound business practice. The design process is neither mysterious nor magic. The failure to recognise this is often expressed in managements' unproductive tendency to use the designer as an exotic menial; menial because his services are required for low-level objectives, to be considered only after the real business decisions have

> been made, and exotic because no-one really understands what he does
> (*Sunday Tribune* March, 6 1983).

If business realized the potential of *craft-orientated* design in terms of overseas markets, perhaps it would be more cooperative. The reliance on function to the point of negating identity and appearance can also be argued to be unsound business practice. It is the visual that communicates the first impression. As Godfrey also said: "Design ... is not cosmetic and therefore superficial, especially if one considers most man-object relationships which usually begin with appearance" (ibid).

IDENTITY: STYLE WHICH HAS BEEN EXPOSED TO THE MEDIA AND MARKET

The previous chapter dealt with the style of the product, in the sense that the style was a result of the designer's interaction with the material and purpose of the design. At that stage the design has not (usually) been subject to media exposure. The product is still in the early stages of its identity formulation. Style, as produced by the designer is only a beginning. Lacan's difference between group and individual identity serves as a basis for the following postulation. By transposing Lacan's theories on the "I" this dissertation suggests that the piece of furniture becomes socialized and re-identified in the hands of the media.

Lacan wrote that the ego exists before societal influence. He emphasised the significance of the mental permanence of *I*. Lacan then explains that a sense of anatomical incompleteness sets in, in the

"mirror stage" of a person's development (Lacan 1966: 2,4). This incompleteness is compensated for by social influence and the specular *I* deflects to the social *I*. (1966:5). This is a formed *I* which Lacan says becomes even more fully formed in the Hegelian use of the legal *I*. Within this centre of ego, exists the unconscious. Lacan positions the *I* within the *Other*. The *Other* therefore becomes the *locus* of the *I*.

> If I have said that the unconscious is the discourse of the Other, it is in order to indicate the beyond in which the recognition of desire is bound up with desire for recognition (Lacan 1966:172).

Identity thus associated with the I, is a living quality. Therefore to apply the term to an inanimate object such as a product or furniture is to suggest that the product has life. A recent article entitled "From hardware to humanware" refers to the collaboration between Philips and Alessi in order to regain the value of the kitchen as a social meeting area. Marzano, senior director of Philips said " We have gained a great deal of freedom but have lost important human qualities (cited by Dallal 1995:82,83). It is this human quality that gives a product the life that an identity carries. The condiment racks and egg-stand designed by *Greenspace* could also be categorized as "humanware" rather than "hardware" which is in line with global tendencies.

Within this scenario the furniture is made and styled with the power of the unconscious, after which it enters the mirror stage of comparison with other furniture. It subsequently enters the social

(and legal) stage of marketing which attains recognition. The style is the ego of the furniture before societal influence. The style becomes an identity when the furniture has been fully exposed to society (the market).

MARKETING MYTHS

This exposure to the market is fraught with problems, as advertising often exaggerates certain stylistic attributes in order to achieve a capitalistic end. The romanticized notions of Africa which are rife in the minds of foreigners in general, create a mythical aura around the continent. Kwane Anthony Appiah's *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (1994) calls for a "demythologizing" of Africa. Appiah regards the needless homogenizing of Africanity as harmful. The propagation of myth in order to serve the ulterior needs of a profit driven manufacturing industry will only produce a tarnished identity and fail to serve both the interests of the consumers and the creators. In an informative article on "Designing Ethnicity: The Ideology of Images" the dangers of essentialist ethnicity in manipulative advertising are exposed. Robert Craig wrote that:"By connecting the ideology of consumerism with ethnicity, advertising becomes a discourse about ethnicity", thereby labelling the people via the product (1991:34).

The new craft furniture of this dissertation runs the risk of being marketed with these myths. If this is done the work will be 'reduced' to a fashion. Borêk Sipek (Poynor 1993:989) said that his work became fashionable when it was published in magazines. Interior design and decorating magazines have the power to persuade people what they

should have in their homes. This situation is as applicable in South Africa as it is overseas. The styles of design groups and individual designers can be co-opted to serve a particular direction.

Borêk Sipek (1993) said:

> The problem with high tech is that it claims to be functional, but it is not really functional at all. In fact, it is a style which ignores function and disregards human individuality. All it really does is demonstrate a level of technical achievement. A chair with a single tube for a backrest just ends up breaking your back. The only justification for such a coldly formalist style is fashion (ibid).

Fashion itself needs further deconstruction. Fashion serves design historians and critics no purpose as a term that remains a label for a superficial passing trend that is partly created by the designers and media and partly by consumers. Fashion is a sociological factor that people involve themselves in because of the human need to belong and to be able to identify with a group (or class) or their choice. Fashion need not be unhealthy or meaningless, fashions have come and gone and reappeared again. As such fashion is a crucial category for design historians. Postmodernism recalls fashions of the past with an enthusiasm that they may not have enjoyed in their original time period.

The new craft designs are being exposed to a public in such a way that they are an exciting alternative to the run-of-the-mill mass produced furniture.It is important that the designers do get

exposure, this need not necessarily mean that the work is marketed with myths of so-called Africanity. It is also important for this dissertation to present both views, acknowledging the risk of marketing which exaggerates, as well as allowing for the honest depiction of the products at this time in our country.

A certain degree of the myth-making in marketing and identity, is left to the reader and viewer, and that is their prerogative. This is surely also part of the enjoyment of the piece of furniture. Williamson wrote of the "absent person" in advertising. The publicity photographs that feature the designs of this research create a space that the reader and future buyer will fill (fig. 13). The advertisement's space (or in this case the feature photograph's) enters into the space of the viewer and vice versa. "... you are *invited to slip into it, to enter its space, drawn in to participate* in a 'discovery' of meaning. One of the most obvious ways in which you are invited to enter the ad is by filling an absence" (Williamson 1983:77).

The meaning that Williamson refers to is a means of determining identity within the objectives of this research project. Williamson said that the meaning is discovered by the viewer. So too can the identity of the furniture be discovered as well as determined by the viewer. Williamson wrote that:

> ...in a hermeneutic universe, meaning is always 'absent', in that it does not reside *in* things, but must be interpreted through their (limited) channels: it is found in the imaginary space 'behind' them. Therefore 'meaning'

> in the hermeneutic sense is always absent from the object to be deciphered: that is why decipherment is necessary. Of course, the catch is that this meaning, supposedly the ultimate 'reality', is in fact of totally imaginary nature; yet it is endowed with an ontological status superior to that of the concrete signifiers which are in fact our only clue to its existence (ibid).

In this sense, to imbue with meaning is to create identity. This dissertation argues that the process of attaching an identity to the design in question is an interactive one. The interaction occurs between the creator (including her/his background and beliefs), the material used, the function of the furniture, the manufacturing industry, the client, and the press/media. Each of the human factors interact with their own baggage of beliefs and aspirations. Meaning is not imaginary, it is the epistemological assertion based on all the interactive factors above at a particular place in a particular time. The process of determining identity needs careful contextualization and cannot be attached only because of certain exterior features on the furniture.

Alessandri said that "Advertising companies create identity" (interview 30.5.1995). However according to the view put forward above, advertising companies do not do it alone. Interior magazine journalists perform a similar function, but only as another factor in the identification process. The identity that is reached may well be partisan to the political view of the time. It makes sense that a style becomes mature when it is fully socialized into the time and

place of its existence. The time and place of this research is the Western Cape of South Africa in 1994 and 1995 when hopes are high but times are still tough for most people.

NEEDS VERSUS WANTS

Within a society that has a majority of disadvantaged people who have been historically deprived[27]. The question of addressing *needs* as opposed to *wants* is a central issue. "Designers have a responsibility to find out exactly what it is that people need ... Designers must recognize that what is right for some people may be drastically wrong for others" (Mulberg 1993: 209). The commitment to research needs and to make provision for these needs, is central to the objectives in intermediate and appropriate technology.

Tony Fry, by referring to Leiss and Baudrillard in the 1991 Spring issue of *Design Issues* subjected the concept of *need* to critical scrutiny. Fry wrote that need is a mobilized cultural figure, which can never be objectively applied (Fry 1991:41). In Fry's terms the "multiplicity and complexity" of need would make a reductive analysis of it dangerous. " ... design for need becomes a call for action" (Fry 1991:42). The need becomes subjectively specific to the circumstances and co-exists with a given theory. In the context of this research the time and place determine the need: Inexpensive locally produced furniture that carries the spirit of the place. The co-existing theory (which Fry suggested cannot be divorced from need) is the government of National Unity's Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP)[28]. To be partisan to the upliftment of the disadvantaged people on both sides of the racial divide at this time

in South Africa is to boost the morale of the RDP.

The production of anonymous furniture that is as sterile as it is slick and finished, does not serve the needs of South Africa. It is true that the dividing line between wants and needs could become blurred by elaborating on the needs of the spirit. A *Flying Cow* chair can be sat on just as well as a mass produced one from *Joshua Doore*[29]. The mass produced item solves the practical problem of sitting, but what of the "Big Idea" as Manu referred to in the act of engaging in an activity?

Fry referred to the impossibility of distinguishing "... between needs and wants in a culture that commodifies wants through the design of desire, and then offers a market response to these created wants as if they were natural needs (Fry 1992:49).

Who is to determine what the boundaries of a natural need are? Jami Hamlin of *Greenspace* said that they try to meet needs by interacting on all levels in order to enhance peoples lives and aspirations. Hamlin said that they produced "less desirable designs" by injecting a "huge amount of consciousness into the designs" (interview 30.5.1995). The "consciousness" is tantamount to the co-existent theory that Fry assert accompanies all needs.

> ... a theory of need has no meaning and therefore only a theory of the ideological concept of needs would make any sense (Baudrillard cited by Fry 1992:51)

The importance of contextualizing need by placing it firmly within the dominant ideology of the time and place of research is central to the hypothesis of this research project. This view is also echoed in the words of Karl Marx:

> The "Need" which consumption feels for the object is created by the perception of it ... Production not only creates an object for the subject, but also a subject for the object (cited by Fry 1992:51).

These words also serve to substantiate the previous explanation on the production of identity as an interactive process. The subject and object or signifier and signified are totally dependent upon each other. Nothing occurs in isolation, not even absent thought. The designers of the new craft, design for a reason and that reason is driven by a coming together of need and desire at a time when the spirit cannot be sacrificed for the practical body.

The meeting point of the *need versus want* debate, is the coming toghether of "idealism" and "pragmatism" in design. Penny Sparke wrote that object novelty turned consumption into a "conspicious" activity (Sparke 1989:105). This was as a result of idealistic fashioning and styling in line with design obsolescence, which was justified in the name of innovation. Sparke pointed out the clash between the idealism of design and the pragmatism of manufacturing, in the period following the Second World War (ibid). In the present period which succeeds many subsequent wars, there is plenty of room for reconciliation between the creating and the making, between the idea and its manifestation.

Professor Ricardo Gomes, the director of the Design Centre for Global Needs at San Franciso State University, said that "We should not confuse design development with design for development" (1995, unpublished paper presented at the Design Education Forum Conference). In the same breath he said that "idealism" and "realism" are the same thing. As far as this research is concerned, it appears obvious that developmental requirements in society must be combined with design development. Design development and design for development need not be confused, they merely need to be united in their goals. In this way idealism and realism or pragmatism, can be combined to serve South African society.

ECONOMICS AND NATIONAL DESIGN IDENTITY

"Economic freedom is an essential requisite for political freedom" (Friedman 1980:2). It is also true that the political success of any government rests on its ability to gain prosperity and a good quality of life for its people. This does not mean that the government provides. Such a belief inculcates an ethic of deliverance rather than production. Every new government makes election promises but the RDP of the South African government does not promise to merely provide. What is called for is empowerment. People need to be offered opportunities not money. Friedrich Engels (1890) warned against belief that the economic factor is the only determining factor in the shaping of history, this makes the theory too abstract. There are many variants within the superstructure. "There is, rather interaction on the basis of economic necessity, which *ultimately* asserts itself" (Engels cited by Kavanagh 1985:6).

People need to work for their money and the less government interference in the small business operations the better. Friedman cites a democratic system where people: "... were free to experiment with new techniques at their risk if the experiment failed, and to their profit if it succeeded" (1980:4).

South African furniture design does not only need to be admired, it needs to be bought. The problems associated with the influential buying power of "First World" markets and the degree to which this aspect can dictate the direction of identity is of extreme importance to this research project. All designers trying to make a living are interested in getting a good return for their product. The spending power of South Africans is not comparable to that of the Americans for example. It is therefore extremely tempting for designers to get into an overseas market that will place large orders and increase profits for the designer at home.

Before the designers in this research left for the ICFF in April/May 1994, an ambivalence and general lack of confidence regarding the potential of local markets was expressed. At that stage the export market was seen to be economically more viable. The designers referred to the problems inherent in the "consignment culture" in South Africa and the slow realization of profit under such conditions. Martin referred to the hesitancy of clients and outlets to put faith in their designs.

A particularly significant factor in determining the commercial success of South African furniture was revealed in an interview with

sales personnel in Cape Town (as well as in the interviews with the designers that form the basis of this research). Senior sales staff at a leading furniture store[30] last year said that most of their stock was imported via Italy and a minimal amount of South African products were bought. The reasons for this buying policy were stated to be because their clientele (from Johannesburg and overseas) were accustomed to high quality finishes and although there was a demand for products from Africa or South Africa, it was felt that there was as yet nothing that met the required standard.

There was a double lack of confidence, both on the side of the retailer and on the side of the producer or maker. This research reveals that there are certainly a number of South African designers who are trying to break away from the restrictions of mainstream commission-oriented design consultancy.

It is a matter of concern that in past years neither designers nor clients have had sufficient faith in South African produced goods. Marion Sauthoff wrote on the views of Alexis Wadman (industrial designer in Johannesburg):

> ...good local industrial design is not very visible in this country because most of the good quality work being done is not sourced here. It is being undertaken for international clients or local clients with international arms. More often than not, the whole design is taken from South Africa to where major manufacturing resources are located and produced there. Until now major international clients have been reluctant to acknowledge connections

> with designers from apartheid South Africa for fear of reprisal. Good South African design has thus not been promoted nor has it enjoyed public recognition either here or abroad (1993:24).

CHANGING PERCEPTIONS IN DESIGN IDENTITY

The South African designers who exhibited at the ICFF returned to the limelight. They had been enthusiastically received in New York. Many of the international visitors to the fair were tired of the full-scale production approach that most First World countries applied to their exhibition space. The innovative and economical method of display that the South African exhibitors used was apparently proclaimed to have the much needed freshness that other countries' high-tech spaces did not. This, together with a positivity with regard to the products themselves, boosted the morale of the young South Africans.

"The gilt-to-hilt opulence of the Eighties has sent consumers reeling for something fresh, casual, and comfortable" (*Metropolis* 1994:82) This is said of American consumers, and in the same article Himmelharb (vice president of the polling service Roper Worldwide) is quoted as saying: "... during the Eighties, the consumer was supposed to aspire to the product ... in the Nineties, the opposite is true: the product should aspire to the consumer" (ibid).

This is not the only article in overseas design publications which suggest a change in the requirements of people. In an article

entitled "There is such a thing as society" Andrew Howard (1994) wrote about the reaction to "excess" and the call for a "more message-related programme ... for an approach that is not sophisticated, not technological and not intellectual, just basic" (1994:72). A return to formal visual aspects in design has therefore also been propagated overseas. The new craft in South Africa answers this need partly because of economic circumstances but also because it is a relief after the man-made world that the people were plunged into in from the sixties to the eighties.

CHANGES IN FIRST WORLD BUYING POLICY

Purchasing for superfical trends is one of the exhausted extravagances of the eighties. People are having to become far more careful in their purchases.

The August 1994 edition of *Domus* featured an article on the Milan furniture show of the same year and the importance of the economic factor was stressed as being more important than ever before:

> The 1994 Salon will not go down in history as the last Milan furniture fair where aesthetics ruled; rather it will be remembered as the first where economics held sway. For thirty years success - or failure - was chiefly attributed on the aesthetic and design merits. Now one is getting a fresh slant on the industry, expressing opinions and evaluations that also weigh the economic side. People have been driven to this by the consumers; latest trends, for buyers have been freed from their blinding brand attachment. For many months now consumers

> have manifested new, radically different reasons for purchasing goods. The have turned out to be far more severe judges than in the past, and very interested in getting a good buy for their money. Convinced that cheap is chic, American consumers of the 1990s seek value for their money (*Domus* Aug. 1994:80,82).

In order to relate these options to South Africa, the work of *Metropolis* is particularly significant. When questioned on the uniqueness of *Metropolis* designs Richard Tremeer's answer was: "Our work is really cheap and that's quite unique" (interview 30.6.1995). To be relatively inexpensive is to be competitive, and if the furniture that is being offered is not what appears in every store, there is even more incentive for its purchase.

At this point it is opportune to return to the question related to "yuppie" indulgence. In an attempt to refute the indictment of elitist design that all short runs tend to have thrust upon them, it is interesting to quote *Metropolis*' attitude to budget:

> "Budget is not just money, it relates to people's lives, they work for that money. The budget just becomes another part of the design input. The design process has all the various informers which include needs, general human needs. All those things come together and budget is one of them" (ibid).

To humanize the monetary reward for work is a sensitive approach to a very human market.

This market is plagued with the dangers of monopoly. Friedman suggested that the way in which to combat monopoly is "...not through a bigger antitrust division at the Department of Justice or a larger budget for the Federal trade Commission, but through removing existing barriers to international trade, that would permit competition from all over the world to be even more effective than it is now in undermining monopoly at home" (1980:229). Protective tarrifs are at present being removed from South African imports which will force South African manufacturers to be competitive in the world market.

At present it is difficult for local designers to compete with prices in the world market as European designers often use cheap labour (in India for example) for the manufacturing of their products which they then sell at extremely competitive prices (Kenau Visser interview 30.5.1995). Although some South African designers are considering the option of having their products made cheaply in the east, there is the constant realization that South Africans should be able to work just as hard and efficiently to produce products at competitive prices. In terms of the RDP, the work should remain in South Africa and provide much needed jobs for many people.

The manageress of *The Yellow Door*[3] provided interesting information on the effect of the past import tariffs, sanctions and the low Rand: "Sanctions ... stimulated local creativity to a marvellous degree" (interview 30.5.1995). This may have been true on a small scale in craft and home industries, but the reality of being excluded from the world market had a far more damaging effect on the whole. It is true that South Africa was forced to provide for itself in the years of

economic sanctions but it was an unrealistic situation which gave many South African manufacturers an unrealistic perception of their production.

DESIGN OUTLETS: A VITAL PART OF MARKETING

There are specific interior shops that consciously promote the new craft of local designers. The role that these considerably visible stores play in the marketing of new craft cannot be underestimated. Two of the major outlets include *Peter Visser Interiors* and *The Yellow Door*, both in Cape Town.

Walking into or even just walking past either of these stores is bound to captivate most people who enjoy making the home a meaningful space. The old adage of buying the feeling and not the product is raised by Peter Dormer:

> The 'traditional' crafts provide a comforting metaphor in a world of perplexity. For them to do this they have also to take familiar forms. The continuing demand for familiarity - for a visual language that has roots. The great strength of the crafts rests in their common visual language of familiar shapes, forms and functions. It does not matter whether people actually want the teapots, jugs or bowls for use: what they are buying, first of all, is a general set of metaphors about the kind of labour that has produced them, and a visual language that is easily understood (Dormer 1990:32).

To purchase a product because of the meaning that it transfers to us, is what Dormer terms "buying a set of metaphors". By distinguishing the meaning from the function, Dormer stresses the power of association, apart from functionality. Meaning and metaphor are intrinsically linked to function in the making of new craft furniture. Dormer was writing about 'traditional' craft objects which continued a particular tradition of making. Although the standpoint of this dissertation opposes the separation of meaning from function, the principle of buying meaning remains an extremely powerful marketing manoeuvre.

It cannot be denied that the outlets which retail the new craft furniture are worlds filled with colourfully textured meaning. Might it be true that the buyers purchase metaphor first and function second? Or do the two merely complement each other? The question asked at the beginning of the second chapter, regarding the designs of the new craft as "yuppie" exclusive items can also be assessed in the light of these commercial outlets.

The manageress of *The Yellow Door* said that the clientele ranged from high to limited income groups. She said that people of all ages and backgrounds are drawn into the shop because it sells "unusual quality items" (Interview 30.5.1995). It is important to note that it is often the less wealthy who buy more of the local design because these are usually young people who are keen to invest in a new identity and find the overseas imported styles out of reach both in terms of price and association. If prices are maintained at a reasonable level then the new craft will not suffer the socio-economic failure that William

Morris did at the end of the nineteenth century.

The Yellow Door is described as both a shop and a gallery. It is at outlets such as these that the makers of the new craft get significant exposure. To be displayed amongst other pieces of innovative design serves to emphasize the vibrancy of the entire collection in the store. Artful placing and lighting, positions the pieces to the best advantage. As a result an image and identity is created, themes are followed through in texture, material and colour. The effect registers a visual identity. The role of the interior shop (together with magazines and critics) in determining an identity for local and national furniture design is therefore central to the issue of the formation of identity in design as a whole.

Peter Visser's Interiors is another major outlet for new craft design. In an interview with Kenau Visser, she said that they do not choose a specific style, but admits that a style of product has evolved and developed over the years. This interior store was the first in Cape Town to promote local design and when it opened seven years ago. At that time Kenau Visser said that people came into the shop and just stared wide-eyed at the locally designed and made products.

In 1995, people are no longer affronted by the style of goods displayed in this interior shop. It has become a place for sourcing the work of new young local furniture designers and craftspeople.

The shop does not look for merchandise, the designers go there

themselves and ask to have their work displayed. In this way they build up a personal relationship with the store's staff. Kenau Visser has been particularly encouraging to artists and designers, by motivating them to develop in a certain way. As she is in constant contact with the buyers, she knows what is being asked for and without pandering to the "whims" of the purchaser, she encourages the continuation of a successful style of design. The link that sales staff like this have with the creators is vital in terms of successful sales. The relationship itself is a form of marketing.

The *Montebello Centre for Design*[32] has its own shop on the picturesque premises in Newlands Cape Town. The shop serves the many designers and crafters who work in the studios provided for them at Montebello. The heading of a recent article in the local press read: "Montebello paves way to local design culture" (Argus 3 September 1995). The centre provides a stimulating workspace for craftspeople and designers as well as for the diners (there is a restaurant on the premises), shoppers and browsers. The aim of the centre is to assist unemployed people to channel their creative ability into skills that will enrich them. The visitors to Montebello are therefore not only exposed to the commercial display of finished goods but they also have the opportunity to see the craftspeople at work. The director of the centre, Tessa Graaf is known for her enthusiastic drive and determination to " ...reverse the trend of design production being based on foreign ideas" (ibid).

NATIONAL DESIGN IN THE MARKETING OF IDENTITY

In nationalist terms, people need a country to call their own, as

much as they need a house to call their home. Therefore it is one of the ideological tenets of the RDP to give the nation an identity. Furniture that is created in this spirit contributes tangible evidence of identity. This identity becomes securely embodied in the magazines and newspaper press. The press and media as a whole are instruments of communication. As such they can be used as methods for the marketing of information and viewpoints which are reflective of the spirit of the time. In a country that has a democratically elected government, the spirit of the time is largely reflective of the people.

The style of all the young designers in this research project is featuring in many of the national magazines under titles such as "Up and coming young designers" (*Cosmopolitan* 1995, October). and "3D Design Democracy" (*ADA* 1995, May) as well as the many promotional articles that *House and Leisure* feature in the monthly issue of their magazine. One of these professionally photographed promotions was entitled "Hip Hardware" with a leading paragraph:

> Heavy-duty and industrial need not mean inelegant. A backdrop of bold colours gives otherwise brut articles made of aluminium, tin, iron and galvanized steel a new function (*House and Leisure* 1994 October:89).

However the designers' themselves do not want to be labelled:

> You can't pin us down and say we are a particular style; we have a flexible identity. We have an open mind, we try to inspire **people** with our design. We try to use the energies in the world around us. We put a lot of emphasis

> on our own individuality. Our work is as unique as we are (*Greenspace* interview 30.5.1995).

Since the collapse of the USSR the smaller constituent countries are desperately reclaiming their nationhood. Whereas on the one hand the West may view the 21st century as the beginning of a homogenizing world force, on the other hand there are many groups of people in Africa and Europe that are clinging to their own identity. This thesis purports that the latter tendency is the strongest in South Africa. South Africans do not have to follow the Japanese path of pure eclecticism, we are not suffering the aftermath of Hiroshima or Nagasaki, we are suffering the aftermath of non-entity. In order to reclaim entity, an identity is sought.

The implicit pressures to establish an identity after the long years of South African isolation and marginalization, are a part of certain types of nationalist ideology. Dawa Norbu (1992:1) wrote of the potent power of nationalism as a "...great inexorable and enduring force in international politics".

Norbu further emphasised the potential of nationalism with reference to Durkheim (1964):

> ... the emergence of national identity under a set of modern conditions ... this complex process, I argue, tends to produce social and psychological 'mechanical solidarity' during a nationalist movement (Norbu 1992:1).

A new solidarity could be argued to exist in the post-election South

Africa. The murdered Black Consiousness Movement leader, Steve Biko[33], said that nationalism is a psychologically liberating consciousness (cited by Mashabela 1987:101). When this nationalist consciousness is amassed, it has the power to market itself and its by-products. "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness" (Marx cited by Kavanagh 1985:101). Nationalism arises out of a need, that need in South Africa has been a consistent call for identity. "The cure for ... loss of African identity was the development of nationalism, but it was nationalism with a difference..." (Fatton 1986:5).

Post-election South Africa posesses a consciousness to reveal to the world an identity that is South African. The South African ambassador to France, Barbara Masakela, recently requested that her Paris apartment be completely redecorated with South African design in order to present an appropriate face to the world (fig. 31). She had inherited an apartment that was decorated in a chilly classical style with the cold vestiges of apartheid present in the spirit of the space (fig. 31). This strong desire for identity is part of what Norbu would describe as a "non-rational" element of nationalism (1992:4). There is an emotional need to share what is within the design soul of this country with the rest of the world. It is important to stress that non-rational is not the same as irrational. Rationality has been the supposed province of capitalism as well as modernism[34].

In terms of national identity, it is interesting to note that Prof.

Johan Degenaar (retired head of Philosophy at the University of Stellenbosch) warned against the power of nationalist emotionalism. In a paper that he presented at the 1994 South African Association of Art Historians, (SAAAH) conference, he said nationalism inevitably implies cultural imperialism. Degenaar continued to say that there are two options: "...domination versus emancipation; ... culture provides no escape route and we should not be surprised if art reflects this tension". This dissertation argues that as a result of the freedom (emancipation) from oppressed apartheid rule, a renewed spirit in design has revealed itself. However it is a spirit wise to the tricks of partisan political entrapment, a spirit that is ever conscious that within emancipation there are often the threats of new types of imprisonment. South Africans have come a long road to freedom and are aware of the many pitfalls. Such freedom can not be traded easily.

Stefano Marzano of Philips Corporate Design sais that design cannot be divorced from politics, and marketing is therefore a propagandistic tool for communicating political ideology through these tangible products of design. Marzono also claimed that: "Design is a political act" (Relph-Knight 1993:10). At the 1993 *Design Renaissance* conference in Glasgow, Marzano emphasized the responsibility that designers carried in determining direction."The solutions we choose are political solutions" (ibid). The mere fact that one is living in a world of people and producing products for the use of these people makes it imperative for the designer to make careful choices that will benefit society. Whatever choice is made will affect the people and in this way design is politicized.

Design's visibility provides a face for the rest of the world, in this way national design communicates ideology. Therefore design becomes part of foreign policy.

Marzano also said that designers have a "duty of leadership" and that they must try "to provide leadership through vision, leadership through strategy" (ibid). Within the present South African situation, the strategies of designers are part and parcel of rebuilding a nation and gaining recognition for the new South Africa on the international front.

SUBSIDIES AND LEGISLATION

Now that apartheid rule has ended and there are new ministers in the South African cabinet, design and Craft need to motivate for subsidies and support. The ministry of Trade and Industry's sponsorship of designers which included *Greenspace* and Conrad Hicks as well as Gary Cotterel at ICFF (International Contemporary Furniture Fair) in New York in 1994 was a first step in this direction. The designers' exhibition space and costs were paid for by the South African government. 1994 was also the memorable year that held the first free and fair general election in the history of this country[35].

In terms of the actual national budget and recognition for design at government level, serious moves have been made to include both design and craft. A summary of the initiatives of the National Action Group (ACTAG) and its regional wing in the Western Cape (WESTAG) appears in Appendix C.

The minister of Trade and Industry, Trevor Manual delivered the opening address at the Design Education Forum conference in February 1995, with many positive comments for entrepreneurial design initiatives:

> An economy that digs from the earth and plucks from the trees, depletes resources. The key is innovation. It requires that we take stock of our own capacity with a view to filling the gaps (February 1993, unpublished proceedings from the Design Education Forum Conference).

The "gaps" are being filled by the small business operations of the new craft. Small business in developing countries was the theme of the above conference. It is not large conglomerates that are going to retrieve the South African economy, it is the individuals at grass roots who are prepared to work with innovation and commitment. All the designers researched in this dissertation have consciously "opted out" of the mainstream because of the frustration of working for large business clients who did not have confidence in new ideas and did not want to take any risks (Martin, interview 12.4.1994). Martin spoke of the myopia of big business. Large companies apparently showed little interest in the novel ideas of these young designers. Martin said that older designers are caught in the grips of very conservative manufacturers who have no confidence in new ideas. Manufacturers were sceptical of new tendencies and furthermore they were so used to just absorbing design ideas and trends from overseas. Martin commented that these manufacturers have had no integrity and no vision in terms of assisting towards the establishment of a South African design identity (ibid).

Vision and integrity are terms that may be associated with idealism. However there is surely place for ideals even in the most realistic of circumstances.

CONCLUSION

The position of freedom within the parameters of responsibility has surfaced as the pivotal problem surrounding the determination of identity. The direction taken by designers who work in the idiom of the new craft are governed by the need for self-provision, as well as a sense of commitment to socio-ecological factors and an acknowledgement of the need to work towards the production of quality items that raise the perception of craft.

There is greater freedom in post-election South Africa that provides for increased opportunity and the concomitant choices that continually face craftspeople and designers. The decision to remain small in business is not always easy as increased sales and commissions call for greater productivity, more staff and bigger premises. This is a decision which the new craftspeople will be faced with because the new craft does not fit into the parameters of late and mature capitalism with large public share holdings and vast company structures. The appeal of the small business as opposed to the large conglomerate is a growing reality. It can now be suggested that the wheel of late and mature capitalism is turning back upon itself, and with the advent of greater economic freedom, a post-capitalist society may begin to flourish in a post-election South Africa. The subsistence method and simple guild trading practices of medieval and pre-industrial capitalism that were mentioned in chapter one offer more freedom as well as more of an opportunity to serve the needs of today's people than the unwieldy mechanism of big companies. An adaptation of the simple trading method in small

business craft practice in the late twentieth century serves as an attractive contrast to the formal business sector.

The products of the new craft are not revivals of the past but an interesting reworking of past practices. Aynsley writes of increasing cultural relativism in the 1990s and that an interest in the handmade and craft traditions has grown significantly (1993:61). He also suggests that "regionalism need not be retrogressive" (ibid). Aynsley's view supports my conclusion that the new craft of the Western Cape region of South Africa is not a regression into past practices or economic systems, it is a re-invigoration of what was an increasingly stagnating system of apathy and eclecticism. The new craft provides fresh impetus and engages positively and innovatively with the problems of material and budget constraints in a small business in the current South African situation.

Craft and especially the new craft has the ability to generate large amounts of money to stimulate the economy. The newly formed "Craft Action Body" (C.A.B.)[36] is a national organization which is comprised of craft practitioners, and representatives from all the provinces of South Africa. It is a highly energetic group that is firmly committed to raising the status of craft and proving that craft enterprises will engender marked economic growth in South Africa. Representatives of C.A.B. have mobilized themselves to provide the statistics of potential monetary growth which results from the impact of craft practices upon the economy. As such C.A.B. intends applying for initial financial backing and support from central government.

As a conclusion to this project it is therefore interesting to note that recent industrial design graduates from the Cape Technikon have joined the craft environment of *Montebello* which was mentioned earlier in this thesis. The indication that young design graduates are willingly combining the skills they have gained from an industrial design course with a technological bias, with the craft of artists and artisans, is a significant factor in the light of preceding research as well as lending weight to the cause of uplifting the status of craft within the hierarchical divisions of design, craft and art.

By joining *Montebello* these industrial designers have made a commitment to using the more appropriate and relevant technology that was referred to in chapter three, within a combined Third and First World environment. The fact that they have chosen to work with *Montebello* also acts as an example of allegiance to craft practices, to other students who are still studying and planning their future contribution to design and society.

The formulation of a stylistic identity has proven to be both complex and problematic and this issue is made more complex when assessed within the light of the global consumer trends which were discussed in chapter three. One of the deductions that can be made from this research is that the consumer of South African products no longer needs to be local. Advanced communication has made the world a smaller market place and postmodern thinking has influenced the increasingly broad base for consumerism. The producers of the new craft furniture in the Western Cape of South Africa are local, but

their chief consumers are not. Local design does not imply a parochial quality and similarly foreign consumption does not imply elitism. The purchase of new craft items by overseas buyers brings money into South Africa and takes the meaningful message of appropriate technology out of South Africa. Consumers from wealthy sectors of South Africa who buy new craft items are recognizing local design instead of buying from overseas as they used to in the past. Even if the lower income groups may not be the chief consumers of new craft, the innovative methods that are used to make something useful out of very little, stands as an example to those who wish to follow suit and the money that the new craft does engender can only benefit the economy and therefore all the people in South Africa.

The identity that the new craft has unwittingly helped to formulate, serves the cause of the South African striving for a *zeitgeist*. This *zeitgeist* is a strong unifying factor which is a powerful force in formulating identity in post-election South Africa.

The media displays the examples of new craft furniture as tangible symbols of a new synergy in South Africa. "Fashion" magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*, *House and Leisure* in addition to the *Inside* colour magazine of the largest selling Sunday newspaper in South Africa, position new craft items in fashionable array. The wide readership of magazines such as these, as well as a slot on prime time viewing on the television magazine programme *Top Billing* (7.3.1996) all combine to create and mould a particular face for the populace. Identity can be viewed as a human striving and readers of such magazines may believe that the "objects" they surround themselves with inform them

of their own identity. Labelling the people via the product is one of the ways by which national and regional design identity can be arrived at. The personification of a *new* South African (or someone who subscribes to such an identity) could therefore be a "Sonwaba Soloman briefcase", a "Martin CD rack" or a "Perold chair". This dissertation has attempted to show that there exists a willingness and keenness in the commercial outlets to continue with the range of new craft furniture, which reveals amongst retailers that new South African consumers have become more aware of the choices available in furniture design in South Africa.

This conclusion must state that in spite of all that may be seen to be possible in a South African zeitgeist the self conscious striving for identity calls the very process of identification into question. Bowe writes of "synthetic" national style (1993:7) and refers to the debates that surrounded the formation of national styles in the aftermath of the many international trade exhibitions that were held in Britain, Europe and America at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the light of this dissertation it can also be concluded that in addition to the media, the role of exhibitions have a marked role in the formulation of identity. The locality of the exhibition, the exposure and profile that it is given, as well as the stands, props and the space itself, apart from the actual exhibits, all combine to influence the ultimate impression made and therefore the identity that is synthesized as a result. To what extent the identity was inherent in the products (that is, those of the new craft) before they went to New York in 1994 or before they were exhibited together at the International Design Education Forum

conference in 1995, is probably minimal. The products take on a much more powerful identity when grouped and photographed together.

The stylistic features that the pieces of furniture carry, are shaped into an identity through the forces of the media. This identity becomes a marketable item in itself. This research reveals that overseas consumers purchase pieces of identity and local consumers buy into an identity that they can relate to. This does not mean that the new craft items are bought as tourist mementos of South Africa but rather as objects which capture something of the identity and of the new spirit of positivity in South Africa. In saying this it must be stressed that the process of constructing identity and identities and the reasons behind this construction, is an extensive subject for further research.

The examples of new craft furniture are appropriately situated at this time of "scrutinized political correctness" and careful alliance to the cause of "transparent" democracy in South Africa. The use of available technology in the new craft will hopefully stimulate others in the fostering of creativity and economic growth.

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ENDNOTES

1. A full explanation of my usage of the term *style* can be found in the first three pages of chapter three, pages 65 to 67.

2. Seldon wrote that structural theory is "anti-humanist". In structural linguistics the word (spoken or written) is both the signifier and the signified. The words (once uttered/written) exist apart and isolated from the person and the human world. "The elements of language acquire meaning not as the result of some connection between words and things, but only as parts of a system of relations" (Seldon 1989:52). Seldon uses Saussure's model as an exemplification.

   Structural theory in language can be aligned with formalist theory in art criticism. Formalism positions the object (or painting) at the centre of the analysis. The "formal" aspects of the work/object include elements such as line, form, colour, materials/ medium, texture and dimensions. These elements are scrutinized for themselves and the relationship they have to each other, *apart and isolated* from the maker and the world. Formalist methodology is the methodology of the modernist movement in art and design. It shares the "anti-humanist" qualities mentioned above and resists social contextualization.

3. Drewal (1987:37) suggested that Levi-Strauss's symbolic approach (in *The Science of the Concrete) is a preferable method for the study of African art as opposed to Panofsky's "iconographic" approach.*

4. The Pre-Raphaelites were a group of artists and writers who sought to recall the spirit of the medieval times. Their use of imagery and inspiration was therefore inspired by Gothic and often biblical texts. Daniel Rossetti, one of the leaders of this movement was a close friend of William Morris and shared a joint lease on the medieval Kelmscott Manor with Morris.

5. Jeanne van Eeden's (1995) paper "The influence and relevance of Arts and Crafts ideology in South Africa" presented at the annual meeting of the Cultural History Association in South Africa, is a useful reference on this subject.

6. Dorothea Fairbridge was a well known writer.

7. The Austrian architect Adolf Loos was a radical reactionary to the ornamentation of Art Nouveau. His essay *Ornament und Verbrechen (Ornament and Crime)* (1908), served to expose the *immorality* of decoration, this included veneers and embellishment upon natural material.

   Tomás Maldonado (1993) also spoke critically of the natural/traditional materials issue in the *Fourth Banham Memorial Lecture*:

   The traditional materials mentioned by way of an example are wood

and stone. And this is where the reasoning begins to look shaky. First and foremost because it is historically far from proven that in the past the surfaces of traditional materials were unadulterated and were thus transparent ...
In actual fact such materials were usually covered by other materials that made it difficult to understand the real nature of what was beneath. In other words, these materials were also highly artificialized. In all ages there has been widespread use of *facing* and *veneering techniques* aimed at enhancing the surface of objects with aesthetic and symbolic embellishments, or indeed at covering up materials rightly or wrongly held to be of little value. Wood and stone have themselves been thus treated (1993:4).

8. The Sangoma was referred to as the "witchdoctor" in colonial days. A certain amount of scepticism regarding the Sangoma still remains amongst differing cultural groups because of the use of dubious ingredients in the recipes for certain remedies. However on the whole the Sangoma is a highly respected traditional healer who uses natural remedies from plants and animals for both mental and physical ailments. The process of urbanization has not affected the black South African's faith in the Sangoma. The urban or township Sangoma provides an alternative to the western medical doctor.

9. See page 46 to 49.

10. "Die groot gevaar" is an Afrikaans expression, which literally translated means "the big danger". During the apartheid years (1948-1994) this expression was often used to label any following that posed a threat to the government. Communism was seen to be the greatest threat, as the majority of South Africans were oppressed and therefore related to the communist ideology of worker upliftment. In this case "die groot gevaar" became "die swart gevaar" (the black danger).

11. The RDP is a post-election strategy of the new South African government which aims to empower the historically disadvantaged people of the former apartheid system. The RDP aims to build the economy in order to create jobs and improve the quality of life. See also endnote 28.

12. The Design Education Forum of Southern Africa was launched in 1985 and is affiliated to all the top international design societies through the SDSA (Society of Designers in South Africa). The board of ICSID (International Council of Societies of Industrial Designers) attended the conference, it was the first time that the ICSID board was to meet in the Southern hemisphere.

13. The Montebello Centre for design is essentially a craft centre situated in the leafy suburb of Newlands in Cape Town. It houses numerous workshops where crafters make a variety of products that can be used in the home.

14. 'Just Exchange' is a registered non-profit organization based in Cape Town but extending its operations to all South African provinces where its services are needed.

The following explanation is quoted in full from a 'Just Exchange' publicity brochure:

JUST EXCHANGE was initiated by Tradecraft Exchange (TX) - a UK based charity with a trading arm - as an ODA (Overseas Development Administration) funded project in response to an identified need for export information by small community based producers or businesses. The project, established under TB's OVERSEAS BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SERVICE was a bid to enable small-medium community oriented businesses to seize export opportunities, that are expected to be in abundance now sanctions have ended, so as to benefit their communities.

This vision has been adopted - but adapted - to capture South African realities and aspirations, and JUST EXCHANGE is now a growing company whose combination of South African skills, experiences and expertise with those of Tradecraft will develop businesses for community development.

15. 'Boardmans' is a leading furniture and home appliance store in South Africa.

16. The "Rainbow Nation" and the "Rainbow People" was a term first coined by the well known anti-apartheid campaigner and Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, Desmond Tutu. This term, with all its bright and contrasting visual connotations, is constantly (and positively) used to depict the ideals of the new nation in the media and advertising. The many colours of the rainbow are indicative of the many colours and cultures of the people of South Africa.

17. The Small Business Corporation in Cape Town took over the old Leyland plant in the industrial area outside Cape Town and converted this large area into working units for small business operations. The small businesses that operate from this site have the benefit of facilities such as electricity, available public telephones, a cafeteria as well as important communication channels between themselves and the SBDC administrators. These administrators provide financial and business advice including additional subsidies if the applicants qualify. The focus of the SBDC has been on the informal sector and the large impoverished black South African population.

18. The architectural design of the BMW pavilion has been the subject of some controversy in Cape Town. The restoration of the old buildings in the Table Bay harbour was in keeping with the Capetonian tradition. However the design of the pavilion is in stark contrast to the Victorian facades of the surrounding buildings. The sharp clean lines as well as the combination of bright white and glinting steel bears no trace of Victorian nostalgia.

19. "Ubunthu" is a Xhosa word for including everyone in decision making. In a large factory this would mean that everyone from the cleaner to the managing director would be able to voice their opinion. This type of approach to decision making ensures that the work force, or group of people involved, all feel worthwhile and equally important. Ubunthu does away with high-handed decision making. Ubunthu is not in keeping with late capitalist mechanisms of power and is a matter of controversy

in political circles in the new South Africa.

20. African tribal structure is based on the cohesion of the group, the elders of the tribe report to the chief but the chief is not an autocratic ruler, he relies and relied on the suggestions of his people. The policy of polygamy in African tribal society also reinforces the importance of a group as opposed to an individual. (See Kavanagh 1985 and Thaw, Sinclair et.al. 1993 for more information. Full references in the bibliography).

21. The Zulu tribe that are concentrated in the area of Kwa-Zulu Natal are especially know for their craft ability. Mission stations such as Rorkes Drift which were begun in the nineteenth century channelled the craft creativity of the local Zulu people towards lucrative means. The art and craft of Rorkes Drifts is the subject of current art historical research in South Africa. The other Southern African tribes that have strong craft traditions include the Venda and Xhosa.

22. When Nelson Mandela was voted president of South Africa after the 1994 elections, although he represented the African National Congress (ANC) he did not form a government of exclusively ANC members. He formed what he called a "government of National Unity" as he wanted all political parties to be represented in cabinet. This spirit of inclusiveness has been widely applauded inspite of the fact that cabinet takes a long time to make decisions as a result of the constant need to appease everybody.

23. At the turn of this century, Pablo Picasso was given an African mask and he was astounded by the simple facetting of form and stylization of features which he duly incorporated into his own work. *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907) is an early example of African masks features, but Picasso was to continue using African forms in his three-dimensional work as well. The incorporation of this "new" direction into cubist art gave an otherwise dryly analytical dissection of form an exotic presence.

24. Richard Hamilton (b. 1922) was a renowned British Pop artist in the late 1950s and 1960s. His collage *Just What Is It That Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?* 1956 has remained as a powerful social comment on the consumerised society of that period. Hamilton's attention to the products in the picture raised those items to a different level of consciousness and imbued them with a more significant identity in the eyes of contemporary criticism.

25. Brutalism was a term used to describe the 1930s use of raw concrete in Modernism. Le Corbusier's *Unité d'Habitation (1936)* in Marseilles is an example. The huge concrete pillars beneath the building bear testimony to the cold uncompromising material for what it is.

26. Torgovnick also refers to the 1960s "Tarzan" syndrome":
The man in the loin skin was a fantasy projection of the man in the pinstripe suit or on the assembly line, caught in a system he had not created and could not control (1990:43).

27. There is currently some contention regarding the exclusive use of the terms "deprived" and "disadvantaged" for black South Africans only. It is argued that both black and white South Africans have been disadvantaged as a result of being culturally separated form each other.

28. The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) of the government of National Unity is a central post-election policy. A separate minister (Jay Naidoo, former trade union activist) has been appointed to the coordination and supervision of the RDP.
One of the prime objectives of the RDP is to provide housing for the homeless.

29. *Joshua Doore* is a large South African furniture chain store which serves the middle to lower market with mass produced items.

30. *Innovations*, a large furniture outlet that has stocked a range of imported and exclusive furniture, including Modernist classics over the past two decades in South Africa.

31. Sue Michelow, "Yellow Door" Garden's Centre, Cape Town.

32. The *Montebello Centre for Design*

33. Steve Biko was the leader of the South African Students Organization (SASO). Biko was a charismatic force in the Black Consciousness Movement in the 1970s and sought to rid black people of their inferiority complex. He was arrested by the South African Security Branch for resisting a banning order by mixing with other people in a hall while writing a UNISA (University of South Africa) examination. His death was announced in September 1977 under the pretence that he had refused food. The inquest into the death of Steve Biko is still in progress and remains a contentious political problem in the "new" South Africa. Writings by Donald Woods are recommended for additional research on Biko.

34. My History of Art Honours' thesis "The Policy of Rationalization in Twentieth Century Appliance Design with reference to Women Consumers" (University of South Africa, 1993) debated the correlation between rationalization in design and capitalist control within Western patriarchal structures.

35. The election held on 27 April 1994 were not without their problems. Chief Mangasuthu Buthelezi, the head of the Inkatha Freedom Party which is largely comprised of Zulu speaking black South Africans, threatened to boycott the elections and only entered into the campaign at the last minute. Buthelezi has constantly fought for the federal independence and extended local government of his own region of Kwa-Zulu Natal. There has been extensive violence and bloodshed as a result of clashes between the Inkatha and the ANC political parties. This conflict remains a large problem in the restoration of peace in South Africa. An extremely useful source on Zulu politics is the doctoral thesis of Sandra Klopper at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.

36. C.A.B. or the Craft Action Body is comprised of representatives from all the provinces of South Africa who are actively involved in promoting South African craft here and abroad. Tessa Graaf is presenting the financial potential of organized craft centres to the Design Education Forum in East London in March 1996. The plan for a tight and structured approach to raising subsidies and support for craft initiatives is as a result of the coming together of highly motivated craft representatives from financially successful organizations such as *Just-Exchange*, *Montebello*, as well as gallery and private business owners. The aim is to provide craftspeople with on-going training in order to channel their expertise so that the quality of craft can continue to improve and provide the country with an industry to be invested in.

APPENDIX A

GREENSPACE PRODUCTS MANIFESTO

GREENSPACE -Creative conceptualisation, realisation and integration of visionary products for a New South Africa.

GREENSPACE -offers a holistic approach to design. Our multi-disciplinary services cover everything from:

- Innovative consumer product design (high and low volume production)
- Three dimensional packaging and product graphics
- Unusual furniture and Interiors
- Functional sculpture
- Creative three dimensional signage

WE FOCUS ON ORIGINAL CREATIVITY

GREENSPACE remains in touch with the leading end of global houseware products by being actively involved in the design, production, management of its own successful products, both locally and internationally.

GREENSPACE enthusiastically strives to expand individual and global consciousness by exploring the relationships between humanity, technology and ecology.

We seek to express, through our creative endeavours, a new South African cultural identity, environmental awareness and to simply celebrate the beauty of the creative, universal energy that flows through us all.

This unique synergy is guided by three multi-talented individuals who share a common vision of a brighter future. They are Jami Hamlin, a qualified industrial designer with international experience, Haldane Martin, a qualified industrial designer responsible for a number of award winning and internationally successful products, and John Vogel, a qualified architect who has run a successful furniture design business which has also exhibited internationally.

We believe that South africa has the opportunity of becoming the world leader in the production and exporting of simple consumer products. We can see this happening with manufacturers and designers making it their social responsibility to ensure that these products contribute meaningfully to our new evolving lifestyles.

APPENDIX B

SCHOOL OF DESIGN
CAPE TECHNIKON

QUESTIONNAIRE: DESIGN IN CAPE TOWN

1. What contribution do you feel you make to design in Cape Town?
2. What has influenced your design?
3. What do you feel is unique about your work?
4. does the success of your work relate to the uniqueness of the design?
5. To what extent does the client pressurize the design process and production?
6. What image or identity have you created in your design?
7. How do the materials that you use help to enhance this identity?
8. What challenges have you experienced in your design career?
9. How do you feel about mass production. Is it an option in your design work?
10. How do you think your work competes with the overseas market?
11. What direction do you feel design is taking in Cape Town?

* Extensive video interviews were conducted as part of this research process. The above questionnaire was drawn up in conjunction with the third year history of interior design class of 1995 at the Cape Technikon. The questionnaire was given to the interviewees in a preliminary interview session prior to the actual shooting of the video.

APPENDIX C

SUMMARY OF ACTAG AND WESTAG INITIATIVES IN 1995

Since the "government of National Unity" came into power after the 1994 general elections, an interim constitution has been in place. Nelson Mandela piloted a process which called for suggestions for the new constitution from *all* citizens of the country. Apart from individuals actually sending personally written lists of suggestions for inclusion into the constitution, organized representative groups have also been established. The national action and task group for the ministry of Arts, Science, Technology and Culture has the acronym ACTAG. Each of the geographic regions also has its own task group, the Western cape Province action and task group is WESTAG. WESTAG representatives include the director of the School of Design at the Cape Technikon, Mel Hagen. Other representatives were Jo-Ann Duggen of the South African National Gallery (also on ACTAG) and Tessa Graaf (of the Montebello Design Centre) who represented the voice of craft in the Western Cape. The purpose of each of these action/task groups is to draft a document which ACTAG will collate into the "White Paper" which will be submitted to the minister of Arts, Science, Technology and Culture, Ben Ngubane. The final document will determine the arts, crafts and design policy in South Africa.

Professor Karin Skawran, head of Art History at the University of South Africa is the coordinator of ACTAG and she presented a report at the 1995 South African Association of Art Historians' conference. Skawran began by quoting David Bunn's key-note address: "... to be positioned in discourse is to achieve a discourse" (unpublished proceedings of the SAAAH 1995 conference). Skawran said that these words were relevant to the endeavours of ACTAG. In order to put this simply: to be involved in the decision making process is to make decisions. Skawran commented on key factors in the drafted document, stressing the importance of a learner and process oriented approach to art education. She also commented on the need for flexibility of assessment criteria in art education. Jo-An Duggen stated that the entries on design and craft had remained as WESTAG drafted them. It is significant that design and craft have been given an adequate hearing in the preparation of the ACTAG document. The fact hat the minister is not only an arts ministry, but also science, technology and culture, is also significant in terms of doing away with barriers that impede united growth.

There are separate entries for design and craft although an entire paragraph (4.2) deals with the relationship of design and craft in the design section. The paragraph is quoted below:

> <u>The relationship of Design to Craft</u>
> The relationship of design to craft is complex. Craft as a traditional form of artistic expression that tends to be community based and reliant on traditional methods, materials and forms is an important economic activity within the South African context. however, in a world that is increasingly consumer oriented, traditional crafts are having to undergo a change in approach. Markets are now being sought outside the traditional local consumption markets and new, often international markets are developing. These markets can be fickle and once the novelty has worn off, craft products sales tend to decline. In addition, craftspeople with the same skills enter the same market with

> similar products, providing fierce competition for a declining demand. Some form of product development then becomes vital, with an understanding of market trends and consumer needs combining with traditional materials and techniques to develop new forms. This requires a completely different approach and range of skills, and brings the whole aspect of craft and craft marketing much closer to the professionalised design situation (WESTAG 1995:4.2).

The change that "traditional crafts" are undergoing is precisely that of the new craft. The dividing line between design and craft under these circumstances is thin. The craft entry calls for the community placement of design students as part of their in-service training. The practice of placing students in industry while they are training is also implemented overseas. For example Professor John Miles of the Royal College of Art in London, believes the link between theory and the market to be all important (1992:32). Within the South African situation, industrial placement of students should include all sectors of that market. At present third and second-year design students are placed in companies within the formal sector in South Africa. The suggestion to send students into the informal sector could only benefit both parties (WESTAG 1995:2.8).

Both design and craft entries call for museum and gallery space. WESTAG sees the need to establish a design museum in Cape Town as there is no such thing in South Africa at the moment. The motivation for subsidies for this museum includes the possibility of Cape Town as host for the 2004 Olympic Games.

Besides gaining recognition for craft, design and art, the "White Paper" will serve as an important motivating factor in determining the budget allowance. The clearer and more convincing the case, the bigger the slice of budget. This is not propagating an expectance of deliverance but design and business need freedom (within sponsorship) to operate optimally. Milton Friedman also said: "Just as no society operates on the command principle, so none operates entirely through voluntary cooperation" (1980:11).