



### **3.3 THE IMPACT OF OUTDOOR INFORMATION TRANSFER IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY**

As an important element of the perceptual environment, outdoor information transfer is also responsible for negative contributions. Outdoor information transfer may have a definite social and economic impact, while the potential for ecological impact is much more limited. The social, economic and ecological impacts of outdoor information transfer are closely interrelated and cannot be separated in most instances, for example the impact of outdoor information transfer on traffic safety, which may result in the loss of human lives, will have definite social and monetary implications. The

poisoning and removal of trees by the outdoor advertising industry have both an ecological and a social or visual impact.

The interrelationship between all human senses must be taken into consideration when assessing any form of environmental impact resulting from outdoor information transfer, since the total impact on all human senses will be more than the mere sum of the impact on the individual senses. The tendency currently exists amongst environmentalists and the public to overemphasise noise pollution to the detriment of environmental impacts on sight and all the other human senses. Although outdoor information transfer is aimed mainly at human sight, hearing will become more and more important with regard to outdoor information transfer in the future. Announcements from moving vehicles or at public gatherings are not an uncommon form of outdoor information transfer, while a combination of sound and sight is already a reality in the United Kingdom in the form of talking bus shelters. Recent technology is even making huge talking billboards of up to 100 square metres a strong possibility (Fox, 1996, p. 20).

### 3.3.1 INHERENT IMPACT AND CHARACTERISTICS OF OUTDOOR ADVERTISEMENTS AND SIGNS

By nature outdoor information transfer has a very strong impact due to its unavoidable nature.

*[The outdoor advertising business] depends entirely for its success upon the occupation of places along the sides of highways and near parks and similar public places. Billboards are designed to compel attention. The advertising matter displayed upon them in words, pictures or devices is conspicuous, obtrusive, and ostentatious, being designed to intrude forcefully and persistently upon the observation and attention of all who come within the range of clear normal vision* (General Outdoor Advertising Co. v. Department of Public Works, 193 N.E. 799 (Mass. Sup. Jud. Ct. 1935) App. dismissed 296 U.S. 542 (1935) and 297 U.S. 725 (1936) as cited by Floyd, online).

Market research undertaken by NFO CM Research in the State of Victoria confirmed that outdoor advertising is seen by the public as different from other forms of advertising with regard to the choice



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<http://www.promotionnmotion.com>

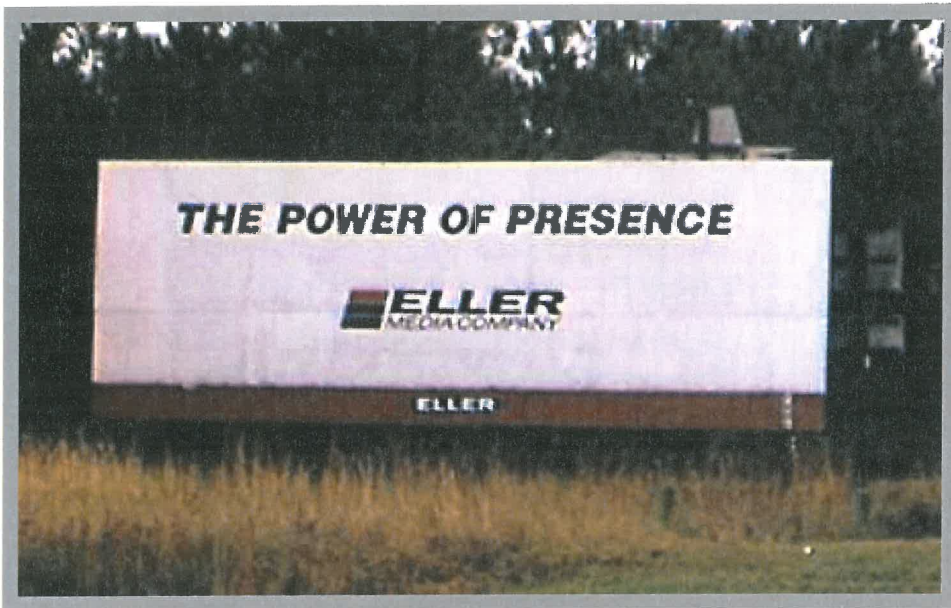


Photo date: March 2000



Outdoor advertising is seen as an unavoidable advertising medium. In contrast with other conventional advertising media it cannot be ignored, covered or switched off. The messages on the photographs (top left and right) tell it all. Various ingenious ways are used to make advertising messages even more unavoidable. A gantry is used to position a billboard right in front of the motorist (bottom right), while a pedal-car parading in front of vehicles waiting at an intersection brings the messages even closer (bottom left).

**Figure 3.17**  
**The intrusive character of outdoor advertising**



Citizens for a Scenic Florida  
<http://www.scenicflorida.org>



Outdoor advertising is seen as an unavoidable advertising medium (top). In contrast with other conventional advertising media it cannot be ignored, covered or switched off. It seems that the only way to switch off a billboard is with the help of nature (bottom).

**Figure 3.17**  
**continued**

to view. The majority of respondents (67 % female and male 56 % male respondents) agreed that outdoor advertising is more intrusive than other advertising media because it cannot be turned off or ignored (Office of Women's Policy, p.5).

It seems only logical that outdoor information transfer's primary function of transferring messages to the observer would tend to dominate its aesthetic contribution to streetscape and setting. This tendency is reflected in certain inherent qualities of outdoor signs and especially outdoor advertisements or commercially oriented sign types which are displayed according to certain principles and which have the potential of transforming functional dominance into a relatively high degree of perceptual impact:

### 3.3.1.1 Competition or snowball principle

Advertisements and signs tend to compete for the attention of the viewer. New additions to the scene tend to be bigger, higher, closer to the street and displaying brighter colours than existing advertisements. This may cause a snowball effect which can very easily get out of hand.

### 3.3.1.2 Encroachment principle

Advertisements and signs tend to advance towards the observer by either encroaching onto or even into the roadway or pedestrian route, or by offering information in advance of the actual site where the product or service is provided.

### 3.3.1.3 Attachment or domination principle

Advertisements and signs display the tendency to attach themselves to existing settings or designs and to force themselves upon the visual scene in a very obtrusive and audacious manner. They often strive to dominate the visual scene by taking advantage of prominent elements in a visual setting, such as a bend in the road or other visual focal points, and in the process may destroy both prominent elements and setting. Advertisements and signs can therefore, in many cases, be seen as visual parasites and may also be described as *visual squatters* or *gatecrashers*.

Photo date: 1994



**Figure 3.18**  
**Competition or snowball principle**

According to the competition or snowball principle, advertisements and signs tend to compete for the attention of the viewer. New additions to the scene tend to be bigger, higher, closer to the street and displaying brighter colours than existing advertisements. This may cause a snowball effect which can very easily get out of hand. In Potgieter Street, Pretoria (top) the snowball principle fully manifests itself with signs competing for the attention of the passing motorist. A newcomer to the scene in Schoeman Street, Pretoria (left) is trying to outdo other shop signs in terms of height, size, colour and even by means of an arrow.

Photo date: January 2000



**Figure 3.19**  
**Encroachment**  
**principle**

According to the encroachment principle advertisements and signs tend to advance towards the observer by either encroaching onto or even into the roadway or pedestrian route, or by offering information in advance of the actual site where the product or service is provided. The photographs on this page are good examples of such advance signs, whether it be advertising for restaurants, accommodation facilities or property development. These examples illustrate a very negative impact on tourism resources.

Photo date: January 2000



According to the attachment or domination principle advertisements and signs display the tendency to attach themselves to existing settings or designs and to force themselves upon the visual scene in an obtrusive and audacious manner. Although any setting or design should have the ability to accommodate change, this ability is often exceeded by the attachment of advertisements and signs to existing elements. This problem is often worsened by the designer's lack of sensitivity towards the need for outdoor information transfer. The original building or landscape design often does not make sufficient provision for existing or changing needs for outdoor information transfer. The above photograph serves to illustrate this point. Almost no provision has been made for attaching shops signs to this smaller suburban shopping complex in one of the eastern suburbs of Pretoria. Shop signs therefore not only impact on the appearance of the building but also tend to obstruct the view from the first floor windows.

**Figure 3.20**  
**The attachment or**  
**domination principle**



Introducing new elements, such as advertisements and signs, into any landscape can have far-reaching visual consequences. It might either lead to excessive order or diversity. In the case of advertisements it will mostly lead to an overemphasis on diversity or visual chaos. Although any setting or design should be able to accommodate change, this ability is often exceeded by the attachment of advertisements and signs to existing elements. In many cases this problem is aggravated by the designer's insensitivity towards the need for outdoor information transfer. The original building or landscape design might not make sufficient provision for outdoor information transfer or changing circumstances, and needs for outdoor information transfer may lead to advertisements and sign exceeding original provisions.

Commercial advertising also displays a tendency to attach itself to more worthy causes such as fundraising for charities and community services in the form of sponsorships, or it may be attached to signs for guiding road users and pedestrians.

#### 3.3.1.4 Imperialistic or ubiquity principle

Like all other advertising media, outdoor advertising wants to be ubiquitous and therefore tries to conquer new territories by entering or filling new spaces, or by making use of new technologies and advertising methods. Referring to place-based advertising, McAllister (1996, p.85) makes the following statement:

*Advertising is ... geographically imperialistic, looking for new territories it has not yet conquered. When it finds such a territory, it fills it with ads – at least until this new place ... has so many ads that it becomes cluttered and is no longer effective as an ad medium.*

#### 3.3.1.5 Transition principle

Advertisements and signs display a tendency for rapid and constant change, since the display periods of individual advertisement tend to be relatively short and can therefore not be seen as permanent visual elements. This feeling of impermanence is aggravated by the fact that most outdoor

advertisements are aimed at people in motion with limited time at their disposal to take in the information on such advertisements. According to an article in PMR, by Davidson and Ogston (1995, p.60), the average consumer has only three seconds to assimilate an outdoor message.

### **3.3.1.6 Disorder principle**

Outdoor information transfer reveals a natural tendency for visual disorder. It can therefore be stated that where outdoor information transfer is managed insufficiently, visual disorder and deterioration will increase with time.

## **3.3.2 PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT**

With regard to psychological impact outdoor information transfer may contribute to various problems such as information overload and a loss of identity, which may contribute to phenomena such as perceptual stress and may also have certain economic implications.

### **3.3.2.1 Environmental overstimulation or information overload**

Perceptual or environmental stress may result from either environmental overstimulation or environmental understimulation. While having the inherent potential to contribute negatively to environmental overstimulation in a major way, outdoor information transfer, as already mentioned, also has a positive ability to contribute to visual diversity and the prevention of environmental understimulation. (See 3.2.1.4.)

Environmental overstimulation may lead to various forms of behaviour breakdown, such as confusion, disorientation, distortion of reality, fatigue, anxiety, tenseness and extreme irritability, followed by apathy and emotional withdrawal in the final stages. This may lead to social problems such as the use of drugs, outbreaks of violence and vandalism and crime, while there are also strong indications that information overload may be related to various mental illnesses (Toffler, 1973, pp. 305 - 326). Environmental overstimulation may also lead to a lowering in human productivity, which will have certain economic implications. According to Motloch (1991, p.284), an overload of information leads

to cognitive fatigue, a desensitisation to setting, and decreased environmental awareness. Decreased environmental awareness might have far-reaching implications with regard to community involvement and environmental care at community level.

Today's urban environment creates a setting that is conducive to information overload. According to Motloch (1991, p.284), *...many people feel that the urban environment is pushing the limit of one's ability to cope with, and adapt to, information overload and the resulting cumulative stress.* Motloch (1991, p.288) also refers to the *...current chaotic urban condition, which fails to communicate effectively, and which desensitizes the viewer, dissuades exploration, conceals meaning, reduces understanding, and decreases sensory pleasure.*

According to Toffler (1973, p.310), environmental overstimulation can occur on at least three different levels, namely:

- ❑ **The sensory level:** This involves the bombardment of man's senses.
- ❑ **The cognitive level:** This level involves the processing of information and the interference with our ability to absorb, manipulate, evaluate and retain information by means of conscious thought due to environmental overstimulation.
- ❑ **The decisional level:** This involves decisions to be made on information received, which may lead to decision stress.

The line between the above-mentioned three levels is not always very clear.

Seen from an aesthetic point of view, environmental overstimulation and man's perceptual relationship with his surroundings are approached mainly from a cognitive and emotionally responsive level. According to Motloch (1991, p.278), the individual relates to his surroundings perceptually by *decoding* information, imparting *meaning* and *emotionally responding* to settings. Image formation, which reduces perceived complexity by aggregating visual parts into some recognizable pattern, can be seen as the essence of this process. Bell (1996, p.4) puts it as follows: *We see our surroundings as an interrelated pattern of component parts arranged in certain ways. We attempt to make sense*

*and order out of the apparent chaos.* The individual, however, has a limited ability to process information, and through this processing, to form images and to ascribe meaning to settings (Motloch, 1991, p. 280). Information overload may therefore cause stress in cases where this ability is exceeded.

Information overload is the function of both the amount and the relevancy of information.

*Recent research leads us to believe that the relevancy of environmental information is extremely critical. It is currently believed that the relevancy of information is even more important than its amount, and that stimuli that do not contribute to our ability to ascribe positive meaning are highly frustrating and stressful* (Motloch, 1991, p.284).

Information relevancy forms the basis of the important concepts of imageability and a sense of place. Imageability or placeness can be seen as the *innate ability* of a place or setting to form vivid mental images, to effect major changes in emotional state, and to be remembered over extended periods of time (Motloch, 1991, p. 296), whereas sense of place can be seen as the *mental construct* of place in the form of a vivid mental image. By creating places with a high imageability the information load can be reduced through the chunking of stimuli into a reduced number of visual units and by aggregating parts into a recognizable pattern. On the other hand settings characterised by a high degree of placelessness may lead to excessive perceptual stress due to irrelevancy and unrelatedness of information.

Image formation and environmental stress can also be interpreted in terms of the fulfilment of psychological needs. The ability to image place through the relatedness of information address the individual's simultaneous psychological needs for understanding and exploration as parts of a two-stage perceptual process which consists of a precognitive and a cognitive stage. These needs are fulfilled through the simultaneous perception of visual order and spontaneity or diversity. Motloch (1991, p.280) views these psychological needs as part of basic human needs which must be satisfied by designed environments in order to be psychologically healthy. Order and visual diversity should not be seen as opposing and irreconcilable components, and diversity should not be seen as the antithesis of relatedness. According to Motloch (1991, p.283):

*Relatedness* is the degree to which individual elements in a setting, and their characteristics relate... and order and spontaneity can be seen as polar extremes of a relatedness continuum. Together they determine the ability of the individual to relate stimuli, to chunk information and form symbols, to ascribe meaning to these symbols as supersigns, and to image place.

Order refers to recognizable patterns and the assimilation and interaction between elements and fulfils the psychological need of *understanding as well as safety and security* (Motloch, 1991, p.283). Spontaneity is perceived as a break in the pattern and refers to contradiction and fulfils the psychological need of *exploration and involvement*. The precognitive stage of perception is the nearly instantaneous appraisal of overall shapes and patterns in the environment; it is rooted in man's inherent need for survival and security and is linked to order. The cognitive stage of perception, based on detail and the need to sustain interest and discover more information, conveys associational meaning and is linked to spontaneity. Order and the precognitive stage of perception may be seen as the binding factor and framework within which spontaneity and diversity may be applied, to which such elements of detail relate and within which detail can be perceived or processed. Excessive diversity outside this framework will lead to disorder and visual chaos, which will in turn result in environmental overstimulation and stress.

By virtue of its function outdoor information transfer can be seen as a prime candidate for causing information overload. This tendency is reflected by the inherent characteristics of advertisements, which are displayed according to the competition, encroachment, attachment, ubiquity, transition and disorder principles as discussed under 3.3.1. Advertisements and signs may promote information overload by means of two interrelated components, which can be traced back to the dual function of outdoor information transfer, namely transferring messages and aesthetic appearance. These components are:

- **Large amounts of information:** The accumulation of a large number of direct messages on a multitude of advertisements and signs that compete for attention and force themselves upon the observer in order to evoke decisions may lead to information overload and stress on the decisional level. This problem is aggravated by the tendency of rapid and continuous change of

outdoor messages and the limited time at the disposal of the observer to take in such messages due to his mobility. (See 3.3.1.5.)

- **Destruction of placeness through the irrelevancy of information:** This is especially true of commercial advertisements, which have a *natural tendency* to accumulate and to be prominent, competing and contrasting, and which *destroy* relatedness, a sense of place and imageability. This excessive diversity and irrelevancy of visual elements caused by the accumulation of signs and advertisements therefore inhibit image formation. In essence this means the ability to reduce the information load is now greatly restricted due to difficulty in aggregating parts into manageable visual units. Consequently the information load becomes unmanageable, causing information overload and perceptual stress. In certain cases the accumulation of signs and advertisements may so dominate the visual scene as to result in visual chaos. This problem is aggravated even further by change as a result of human movement, which can be seen as an important part of experiencing landscape. (See 1.4.1.4.) Most advertisements and signs today are aimed at the road user. Due to the speed of the motor vehicle interaction between perceiver and setting becomes tense and impersonal and the possibility of aggregating visual parts into manageable visual units becomes even more impossible.

The mere excess of information may also inhibit image formation and chunking of information even if relevancy of information does exist to a certain extent. Image formation may therefore be inhibited and frustrated by both irrelevancy and excess of information.

The above-mentioned interrelated components of information overload may lead to a perceptual blockage or even perceptual shutdown in extreme cases, which inhibits or prevents image formation and the transfer of information. This can be seen as a built-in defence mechanism to try to counteract perceptual stress which is activated when information overload reaches certain levels. Barr (1970, p.29) refers to perceptual shutdown on accord of placelessness or ugliness as *landscape blindness* and quotes Richard Latham in this regard:

*Rejecting what demands too much can cause us to stop seeing ugliness around us, and even cause us to contribute to the chaos and confusion of our world...like the man who strews empty beer cans around himself on a public beach. This happens*

*imperceptibly because man is an adaptable animal, and to survive he accepts very quickly, almost subserviently, the pressures of his environment. His brain is apparently designed so that when intolerable signals come in over the circuits, **the perceptive systems themselves shut down and do not perceive**. A man can live and even be happy in the environment of a garbage heap ... any object that is ugly, bad, offensive, corrosive – unless it creates real fear and the urge to flee – **means the shutdown or withdrawal of some human potential**.* (Emphasis added.)

John Miller, (online) has made the following statement in this regard:

*To maintain sanity, the public anesthetizes itself. We participate in and comply with the defacement of public space and the negation of right to privacy by our willingness to desensitize ourselves to these excessive assaults upon our sensibilities. We become oblivious to our immediate environment, sort of functionally unconscious. In compensation, billboards get bigger, litter gets deeper, graffiti becomes more outrageous.*

Perceptual blockage and shutdown have a direct influence on the efficiency of the primary or message function of outdoor information transfer, which should be an important factor to be considered by the outdoor advertising industry. The **amount of information** plays an important role in this regard. Effectivity of individual advertisements through limited information on each sign is a principle that is already acknowledged by the outdoor advertising industry. According to an article in PMR by Davidson and Ogston (1995, p.60) the message on an outdoor advertisement should ideally be communicated in less than seven words since the average consumer has only three seconds to assimilate an outdoor message. The importance of limited outdoor messages was illustrated by research on billboard advertising undertaken by the Canadian media giant *Mediacom* in conjunction with the University of Alberta. This comprehensive analysis involved 500 awareness studies, testing the impact of various billboards on their respective audiences. A very important finding with regard to the number of messages on a billboard was that single-minded, focused advertisements deliver more impact. Unlike other advertising media where there is usually more time to communicate information, with billboards often *less is more*. This principle was dramatically illustrated by an advertising campaign for a specific product. The original billboard idea with one message achieved an awareness

rating of 41,1%. The same billboard with two messages had a 36,7 % rating, while awareness decreased to only 29,2 % after five messages (Outdoor Graphics, 1997, Summer (1), p. 6).

It seems only logical that if an increase in information on the same advertisement leads to a decrease in awareness, the same tendency should also be relevant when the number of advertisements and messages increase. The assumption can therefore be made that a proliferation of advertisements and signs will lead to a decline in the effectiveness of individual advertisements and signs. This conclusion is supported by the concept of *advertising clutter*, a problem recognised by the advertising industry in general and which can also be applied to outdoor advertising. The problem of advertising clutter is summed up by McAllister (1996, p.15) as follows: *Advertisers believe that the effectiveness of their messages decreases if their competitors' messages are too close or if too many other promotional messages swallow up their message.* Edward T. McMahon, Director of the American Greenways Program, describes this principle as follows:

*In an effort to attract business, merchants often engage in a destructive competition to see who can build the biggest, tallest, most attention-grabbing signs. Ironically, in such competition both the merchants and the town lose. When there is an overabundance of competing signs, the message of each is lost. One city planner explained it this way: "When everyone shouts, no one can be heard; when all speak softly, each voice is distinct"* (Citizens for a Scenic Florida, online (1)).

The following also gives a good description of this principle:

*For street graphics to communicate effectively, they must be neither too large nor too small, neither too numerous nor absent altogether, neither too garish nor too bland. The principle of less is more applies here. A smaller number of well-designed street graphics that are properly related to the activities to which they pertain do a better job of indexing or selling than a plethora of gaudy graphics that compete for the viewer's attention... When the environment becomes overload with graphic display... the cumulative is negative. The viewer actually sees less, not more* (Mandelker & Ewald, 1987, p.33).

In some cases it becomes physically impossible to read all the information provided on outdoor advertisements. Scenic America reports on a certain section of road in Hampton, Virginia, where



there were so many signs that a motorist travelling at 45 mph would need to read 1 363 words per minute just to understand all the information presented. This is five times the normal reading speed of a stationary person (Scenic America, online (1)).

**Information relevancy and image formation** should also be taken into consideration with regard to the effectiveness of individual advertisements. If contrast or diversity is used to focus the attention of the road-user on individual signs or advertisements, such contrast should still be within the framework of order and recognisable pattern. An advertisement will be most effective when it contributes to placeness and a sense of place, since placeness will lead to the creation of vivid images of which the advertisement will be part. Such images (and advertisements) will effect major emotional changes and will be remembered over extended periods of time. By contributing to sense of place information overload, stress and perceptual blockage will therefore be prevented. This argument is supported by the advertising industry's universal recognition of the important relationship between advertisement and external media content or the media environment that surrounds an advertisement – such as an advertisement on backpacks placed next to an article on hiking trails in an outdoor magazine. McAllister (1996, p.15) describes the complementary role of external media content as follows:

*Advertisers want their ads to be surrounded by media content that attracts desirable consumers and that complements the ads. Advertisers especially want to be near **media content that puts people in a mood receptive to seeing and liking their ads.*** (Emphasis added.)

If a more inclusive approach is to be followed with regard to outdoor advertising as an advertising medium, the surrounding outdoor environment forming a background to advertisement and sign structure should be seen as the external media content that would fulfil such a complementary role. The principle of utilising the surrounding environment is already applied by the advertising industry with regard to the concept of place-based advertising in which case the supporting role of external media content, such as television or radio programmes, is supplemented even further by the surrounding place – such as an advertisement for a health drink during a sports programme on closed circuit television in a gymnasium. In this regard McAllister (1996, p.85) refers to *the matching of symbols in the ad to the tone and expectations of the place*. The unique atmosphere or placeness of a specific social place is therefore used to give credibility to the advertising message of place-based advertising and to put the potential customer in the right state of mind. In this way a synergism

is obtained between advertisement, place and visitor and placeness is used to amplify the advertising message.

### 3.3.2.2 Other impacts related to placelessness

A sense of place can be very easily destroyed by insufficient control of advertisements and signs. *Genius loci* is very sensitive, fragile and vulnerable, since factors contributing to it may be difficult to identify and, according to Bell (1996, p.108), *it is certainly vulnerable to damage or destruction if not recognized or valued and treated with sufficient sensitivity*. Such placelessness may, apart from contributing to information overload, also have various other negative consequences:

#### (a) Crime and vandalism (See also 2.2.1.3)

Placelessness and untidy environments may result in psychological environments conducive to crime and vandalism since an impression of a lack of control by and involvement of authorities and communities is created in the mind of the criminal. Even in cases where the crime rate might actually not be too high, placelessness could still result in psychologically unhealthy places by contributing to a feeling of insecurity and stress among people making use of such places.

Since the proliferation of advertisements and signs will in most cases contribute to creating untidy places and could therefore contribute to crime, vandalism and psychologically unhealthy places, Schmio Awards (online) sees billboard proliferation as a contributing factor in creating unsafe environments:

*Communities across the country [USA] are demanding billboard reform as one stage in a broader movement to revitalize inner-city neighborhoods and create safe environments for children.*

Abandoned advertisements and empty structures will contribute even further to untidy environments and a perception of non-involvement and lack of control. According to Miller (online), the proliferation of outdoor advertisements and signs also leads to littering and graffiti, which aggravate the problem of untidy, unsafe and psychologically unhealthy environments.

*When we tell advertisers it's OK to turn our communities into round-the-clock outdoor commercials, we are telling litterers and defacers that thrashing aesthetics and ignoring our right to privacy is acceptable. Litterers and defacers, and many of the rest of us, realize there is little difference between the crass intrusiveness of a billboard and that of deliberately dumped garbage or scrawling on a wall. ... Like the billboards they see around them, they have no conception of self-restraint. They are imitating, on an individual scale, the proliferating commercialization we have permitted to transform public space from a non-exploitative common ground into a commercial hunting ground. In the case of billboards, the objective is to establish product identity; in the case of litterers and defacers, it is to establish personal identity*

It is interesting to note that graffiti, an act of vandalism, also constitute a form of outdoor information transfer. Spry and West (1985, p.10) define graffiti as follows: *An intentional, unauthorised defacement of a surface by words or drawings and intended for public consumption.* According to Spry and West (1985, pp.14, 50; 53), unauthorised posters may even be seen as a form of graffiti. A more appropriate definition of graffiti might therefore be: *An intentional, unauthorised defacement of a surface or structure by words, drawings or any other message and intended for public consumption.* This altered definition will now not only include posters on larger surfaces such as walls, but also posters attached to smaller surfaces such as the poles of traffic signs and other unauthorised advertisements such as stickers attached to various surfaces. According to Spry and West (1985, p.10):

*Graffiti are applied to other people's property and almost invariably cause some damage, nuisance, offence or expense and therefore are a type of vandalism. However they differ from the wantonly destructive vandalism in that they carry some kind of message, hence are a form of communication.*

Although numerous factors contribute to the phenomenon of graffiti, there is a clear indication that it is attracted by placelessness and visually deteriorated environments. *There is either a conscious or subconscious preference for walls of derelict rather than heritage buildings, ... for depressed rather than pristine inner urban centres* (Spry & West, 1985, p. 28).

Graffiti and littering can be seen as good examples of the disorder principle (see 3.3.1.6), which implies that where outdoor information transfer is managed insufficiently visual disorder and deterioration will increase in time. Just like littering, graffiti, an act of vandalism, which does not consist of scratched, painted or written messages only, but may include various other types of unauthorised outdoor information transfer, will invariably lead to more vandalism and an increased tempo of visual deterioration. *Its presence is an incitement to further defacement by vandalism, destruction and arson...* (Spry & West, 1985, p. 1).

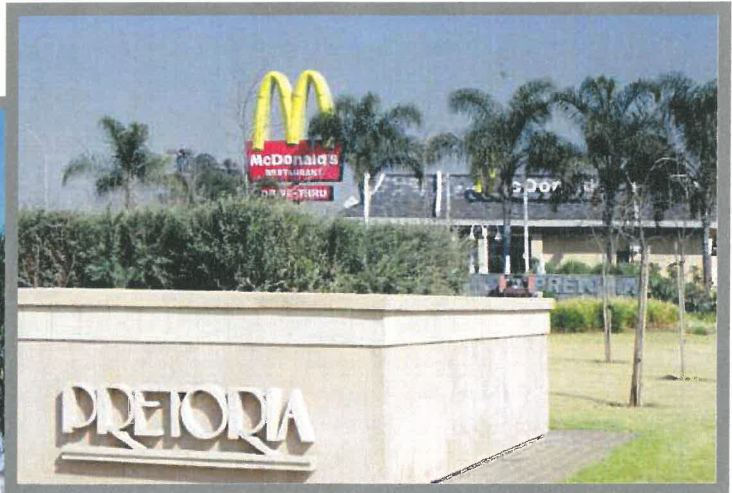
The graffiti phenomenon *offends the eye and the senses and contributes to the ugly side of urban life - it shocks the sensitive – reduces the value of property - damages invaluable heritage buildings and monuments – reduces the function of ... decorative features* (Spry & West, 1985, p. 1). It may even include the defacement of authorised advertisements, signs and posters. The costs of removing, cleaning and protection against graffiti are staggering. *It was estimated to cost the United States \$600 million a year as long ago as 1973 and \$387 million in the U. K. in 1983* (Spry & West, 1985, p. 1).

In certain cases outdoor advertising may prevent graffiti if they are placed on surfaces which are graffiti prone.

### **(b) Poor community identity and a uniform world culture**

A strong interrelationship exists between sense of place and community identity. (See 2.2.1.1). The creation of uniform visual environments through the promotion of a world culture and global economy should therefore be seen as a key factor in weakening the identity of groups or communities, which will lead to an identity crisis and uncertainty. A lack of community identity will also lead to a lack of community involvement and therefore to a lack of environmental care at a community level. Since sense of place forms the essence of the perceptual environment, a weakening of sense of place through a uniform world culture may have far-reaching consequences for perceptual resources.

The United States of America plays a leading role in promoting a world culture.



Outdoor information transfer may play an important role in promoting a world culture by creating a uniform visual environment. This tendency has a very negative impact on both sense of place and community identity. International franchises are the main culprits, not only through their uniform logos and signs, but also by using standardised buildings and structures as a way of advertising their products and services. A classic example in this regard is the Eastern Gateway to Pretoria. When one enters Pretoria from the east you are not greeted by visual elements expressing Pretoria's unique character, but by global symbols in the form of McDonald's, KFC and Holiday Inn signs.

**Figure 3.21**  
**Uniform world culture**



**Figure 3.22**

**Outdoor information transfer contributing to crime and vandalism**

Insufficient control of outdoor information transfer may lead to placelessness and untidy environments which, in turn, may result in psychological environments conducive to crime and vandalism since an impression of a lack of control and involvement of authorities and communities is created in the mind of the criminal.

Abandoned advertisement and empty advertising structures such as those shown on this page are important contributing factors to untidy environments and a perception of non-involvement and lack of control.

*Perhaps the thing doing the most to keep the U.S. economy afloat is the one export it has that the rest of the world craves: its culture. But it's not the culture of the San Francisco cable car, the Kansas City barbecue, the Mississippi Delta blues or the Adirondack chair. Rather, it's the monoculture that has already done so much to suppress the once-beloved trappings of local America: Hollywood movies, MTV, McDonalds and the Gap* (Ammann, online).

Outdoor information transfer and especially commercial advertisements may be seen as a major contributor to the creation of more uniform visual environments in accordance with a global economy and culture. Almost every corner of the globe has been conquered by billboards and other forms of outdoor advertising. Once isolated regions such as Tibet are now displaying large numbers of outdoor advertisements (Shengzhen Daily, online). In Nepal the international tourist, on his way to do some trekking in the mountains, is targeted by a series of billboards along the Katmandu-Pokhara road, which are aimed at creating international branding (Bicknell, 1999, online). The display of global products through outdoor advertising plays an important role in establishing visual uniformity. According to Cimino (online), *outdoor advertising is arguably the medium best adapted for branding products on a worldwide basis*. This tendency is enhanced even further through current international trends in the ownership of outdoor advertising companies. The last few years have seen an increase in global outdoor ownership. In 2000 64% of the world's out-of-home media were already owned by only three global players (Outdoor Graphics, 2000, Autumn (2), p.12). These trends favour international outdoor advertising campaigns with a large degree of uniformity in advertising contents and structures. *Poster Publicity International*, a London-based international outdoor advertising specialist agency, has described the effect of a globalisation in outdoor advertising contractors and agencies as follow:

*Outdoor is the international corporate medium offering advertisers intimacy and familiarity within each country and region. It tells a global audience that they offer the same values worldwide. We are just beginning to see the emergence of global campaign planning and buying* (Outdoor Graphics, 2000, Autumn (3), p.15). (Emphasis added.)

National trends also favour a national outdoor advertising monoculture (Outdoor Graphics, 2000, Autumn (2), p.13). In South Africa only four companies were responsible for up to 90% of the outdoor

advertising business in the year 2000. In the United Kingdom outdoor advertising sites were owned by 150 different contractors in 1990. In 2000 there were only 17 contractors, four of which controlled over 80% of the outdoor advertising market (Outdoor Advertising Graphics, 2000, Autumn (3), p.14).

Uniformity in advertising images and artwork is favoured by advances in printing technology. Media Options Inc. (online) made the following statement in this regard:

*Advances in computer printed vinyl techniques enable you to have the same beautiful, 4-color bulletin in Tallahassee that you have in New York at a fraction of what it used to cost.*

The influence on more uniform visual environments is not limited to advertising structures and contents only, but also includes buildings and premises. According to Burke (1976, pp.111-112):

*Most multiple stores and large retailers use their premises as advertisements in themselves by applying standard "house rules" for facades, fascias and lettering, without regard to geographical location or to the scale, proportion and style of their neighbours. The same shop-front is imposed in Oxford Street, London, as in the high street of Oxford, or of a cathedral city, county town or suburb. Rigid adherence to this practice on the part of large concerns with the necessary influence to get their own way has caused townscapes to lose much of their distinctive identity.*

This tendency has escalated in recent years with the rise in franchising on a global scale. This phenomenon has become an important factor in the destruction of local character and community identity in *automobile-oriented* countries such as the United States and South Africa.

### **(c) Destruction of a Sense of Permanence**

As one of the most rapidly changing elements in the modern urban landscape, outdoor advertisements and signs have the inherent capability of destroying a sense of permanence and belonging. Bell (1996, pp.124-8) sees *continuity* as a very important aesthetic principle with regard to setting and landscape since it implies a sense of permanence by providing a framework within which changes can take place over time. In this regard he writes:



*... continuity may provide a dynamic theme of stability at one level within which process and change can occur... Continuity represents the durable, long-term structures in the landscape allowing change to occur without chaos.*

This need for permanence and continuity is becoming a subject of ever-increasing importance in contemporary society characterised by rapid lifestyles and constant transformation. In the past the spatial patterns in the landscape grew and developed over time in an organic fashion, which led to a strong sense of continuity and permanence.

*Settlements may have started in a small way and have gradually increased in size over many years. In Britain this development was originally not planned but slowly changing local traditions in building style, use of materials and methods of farming ensured that it took on a pattern which had continuity across large areas of similar landscape and over a long period of time* (Bell, 1996, p. 126).

This is no longer the case today and if advertisements and signs, of which the actual contents tend to change very quickly, should be allowed to dominate visual scenes or settings, such a domination will lead to an overwhelming sense of impermanence and instability.<sup>21</sup> If the variety and numbers of signs and advertisements in the modern city are taken into consideration this is a very strong possibility in

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<sup>21</sup> Modern technology has shortened the lifespan of billboards and larger advertisements even further by reducing the printing cost. Huge computer-generated images reproduced on giant rolls of vinyl polyester can cover whole sides of buildings and their windows. Such multi-storey wallsapes can be slapped onto buildings within hours, unlike hand-painted signs which can take months to create. Carrie McLaren (Stay Free, online (1)), an anti-ad activist, made the following comment with regard to the sense of impermanence created by vinyl advertisements which are starting to dominate certain parts of Manhattan:

*Because vinyl ads can be changed in a matter of hours, I think they reinforce the idea that everything is temporary, plastic and disposable. They make the street look like a website. Entire buildings are suddenly deleted. And that can make you more inured to your whole environment.*

In many cases the intention of the advertising industry is to change the advertising image in a relatively short period of time in order to stimulate the attention of the viewer. According to Billboards.co.za (online), the introduction of a certain advertising opportunity *offers the advertiser a package whereby his creative message can be "walked" before the message suffers a burnout, becoming part of the scenery.* The rapid changing of advertising images and messages finds its ultimate expression in electronic signs with variable messages and *video billboards* where text and messages are changed over very short periods of time.

certain areas of most cities. A more permanent visual framework and a continuity of patterns in the landscape is therefore needed in order to absorb changing advertisements and signs of a less dominant nature into a more dominant whole.

### 3.3.2.3 Devaluation of place and commercialisation of placeness

In accordance with the imperialistic principle (3.3.1.4), outdoor advertisements entering and dominating certain places may devalue and even degrade the integrity of such places. Wernick (1991, cited in McAllister, 1996, p. 88) claims that advertising devalues reference systems, because the advertisement implies that the reference system, no matter what it is, is always subordinate to the purpose of the advertisement, which is to sell a product. In the same manner outdoor advertising can devalue certain places since the environments surrounding outdoor advertisements can be seen as the reference system or external media content. In South Africa schools, like many other institutions, are presently going through difficult economic times. Certain elements in the outdoor advertising industry exploit the situation by offering schools an income in return for allowing them to display outdoor advertisements on school sites. Schools and similar institutions with a prestigious image and educational status may thus be devaluated to mere places of consumerism and commercialism. This will also imply that value systems taught at such institutions may be impaired and devaluated to a materialistic level. Outdoor advertisements might in the future even invade, conquer and devalue more sublime places like church sites.

By conquering non-commercial urban functions, outdoor advertising may contribute to devaluated uniform cityscapes of functional and visual monotony where a school cannot be distinguished from a church, or residential functions from commercial functions.

Place-based advertising, which includes outdoor advertising, utilises the unique character and appeal of certain places as a mechanism for advertising. It therefore devalues placeness and sense of place to a mere commercial commodity. According to McAllister (1996, pp.221;88), advertising subordinates its referent systems by turning it into utilitarian systems which are useful for selling, while *place-based media's pervasiveness and conspicuousness make an even louder statement than traditional mediated advertising about commercialism's symbolic superiority over its environment.* In



Outdoor advertising shows a tendency to devalue the integrity and value systems of places such as educational and religious institutions.

The photographs on this page speak for themselves. Two cemeteries and a church are dominated by tobacco and alcohol advertisements symbolising the superiority of commercialism and materialism over spiritual values. The message on the billboard in the top photograph, which reads *sent from above*, may also be seen as objectionable to public morals. (See Figure 3.25.)

**Figure 3.23**  
**Devaluation of place**

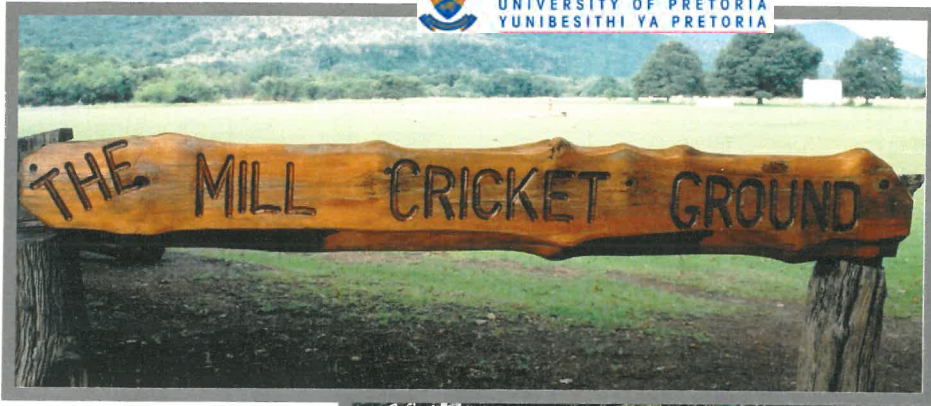
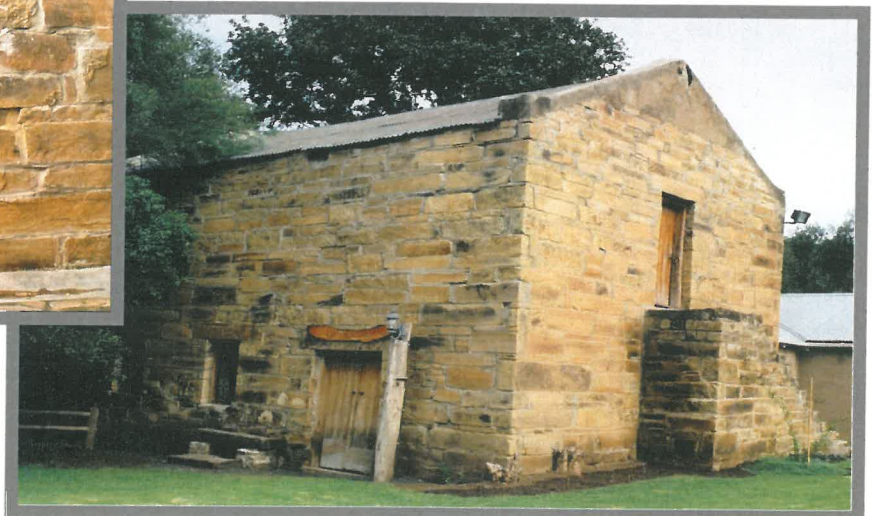
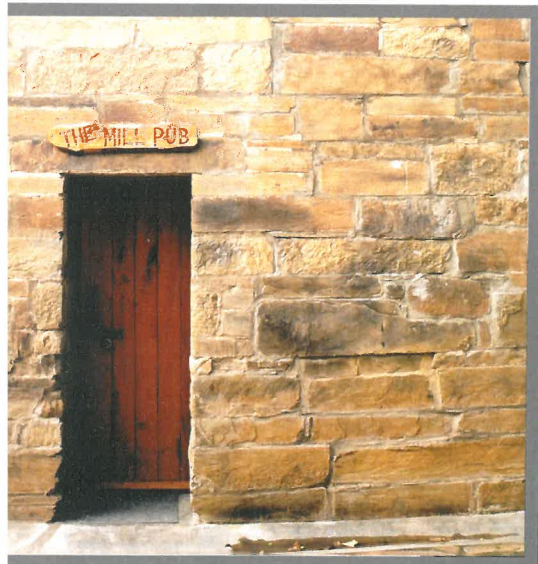


Figure 3.24

Devaluation of place and  
commercialisation of placeness





Date of photo: April 2001

Cricket used to be a game with much tradition and cricket grounds places with much character - places with grand old clubhouses and lots of shady oaks. Unfortunately the game and the ground have been commercialised to a large extent. Oaks and plane trees have been chopped down to erect more stands in order to bring in more money. Billboards and advertisements along the grounds have played an important role in breaking down tradition and character. Certain smaller cricket grounds, however, have succeeded in retaining their character.

Such a cricket ground is the Mill Cricket Ground (MCG) on a farm near Bedford in the Eastern Cape with a historical mill as a pub and massive oaks providing shade to spectators. This is probably one of the most beautiful cricket grounds, if not the most beautiful, in South Africa. Unfortunately a standardised beer sign on a very unattractive structure directs the visitor from the highway to the cricket ground. Thus a very negative first impression of the Mill Cricket Ground is created in the mind of the visitor while its rich placeness is devaluated and commercialised. A directional sign is needed that will reflect and enhance the placeness of the MCG. Even a standardised brown tourism sign on an attractive structure will make a huge contribution in this regard.

**Figure 3.24**  
**continued**

this manner true sense of place may be lost, which may lead to uniformity and monotony. Outdoor advertisements should be allowed to supplement placeness and not to dominate, conquer and commercialise. Environmental managers should not manage the perceptual environment as a pure commercial commodity. If such an approach is followed the perceptual environment may become less valued in the eyes of the public. In certain instances placeness may be obtained only through the absence of all advertisements. The tendency of outdoor advertisements to be ubiquitous should therefore be managed and controlled in order to ensure places that are totally advertisement free.

Outdoor advertising, linked to sponsorships, may also devalue prestigious sporting and cultural events (McAllister, 1996, p. 221). By dominating and conquering events such as the Comrades Marathon, the values and spirit for which such events stand may be seriously devaluated or even destroyed by outdoor advertising. The proud and rich tradition of the Springbok rugby team has been injured by highly visible beer advertisements that are being displayed on the chests of the national team members and which are more prominent than the Springbok emblem. Rugby supporters can therefore not be blamed for feeling that the Springbok tradition has been replaced by a new tradition of commercialisation and alcohol consumption.

#### 3.3.2.4 The impact of vernacular culture

Outdoor advertisements and signs are being used as a medium for expressing modern vernacular culture. This takes on a variety of forms such as advertisements and signs in strip development and commercial and entertainment districts, and even the collage of brand names or corporate logos on NASCAR racing cars in the USA, which has been described as *a true folk art of our time* (Graphics 303, 1996, p.25). According to Blake (1979, p.27) the outdoor advertising industry even sees billboards as the art gallery of the public. Proponents for the greater recognition of modern vernacular expressions base their case on the argument that such expressions *accurately portray the values, dreams, and aspirations of major portions of our heterogeneous culture*. (Motloch, 1991, p.8). Blake (1979, p.14) describes this viewpoint in a more direct and less flattering manner. According to him this so called *pop-garde* have *pointed out that there are certain resources or manifestations on the popular scene that have been ignored for much too long and that should now be recognized for their potentially invigorating values. Garish billboards, flashing neon signs, and vulgar eyesores on every*

*roadside of the land have become, in the eyes of some highly perceptive artists, a new and utterly unexpected cultural resource: a new pop art, a new pop architecture.* Modern vernacular elements are seen as an important inspirational source for the grand tradition of design by the so-called *pop-garde*.

A clear distinction should be made between modern vernacular design and vernacular design in a more traditional sense. **Modern vernacular design** means a design process involving popular structure and style with no professional designer involved in the unselfconscious expression of important needs, values, desires and dreams of a people; where the owner of the structure plays an integral part in the formative process and where form, model, materials and construction reveal a certain amount of consistency and standardisation. It may also involve mass-produced or standardised units or structures designed by professional designers.

**Vernacular design in a traditional sense** means a design process involving the traditional building style of a specific cultural group within a certain geographical location with no professional designer involved in the unselfconscious expression of the needs, values, desires and dreams of such a cultural group; where the owner of the structure plays an integral part in the formative process; and where form, model, materials and construction reveal a large amount of consistency and standardisation. A professional designer may be involved giving expression to such a design process within the relevant geographical location, but only without emphasising the monumental and overt and without basing such design process on an anthropomorphic mindset.

The **grand tradition of design** means the professionally designed component of the total landscape, including its monumental and overt structures and buildings. It can be seen as the stock in trade of the professional designer. It is the high art that is usually taught in schools of design. The grand tradition of design is based on an anthropocentric (human as centre) and anthropomorphic (human as form-giver) mindset, communicating design statements as an expression of the intellect and personality of designers and the characteristics of certain movements and design style.

The involvement of ordinary people in forming the landscape through vernacular design can be seen as a very important part of the visual environment.

*Landscapes that are inhabited by humans are records of, and transmit meaning about, the culture... The largest portion of the landscape consists of common elements...referred to as the folk tradition (Motloch, 1991, p.8).*

Motloch (1991, p.8) also makes the following statement:

*The fact that the vast majority of this landscape is unselfconscious, that we seldom think about it, results in a landscape that more honestly reflects the underlying forces to which it responds.*

Most outdoor advertisements and signs can be seen as vernacular design elements due to the lack of professional designer involvement or due to mass-produced standardised sign and advertisement units and structures. The grand tradition of design is mostly limited to actual content of certain advertisements, which excludes advertising structure, and to specially designed signage projects.

Outdoor information transfer provides a favourable medium for expressing modern vernacular design. Advertisements and signs may play a rather dominant role as vernacular design elements in areas of economic activity such as commercial, industrial and entertainment areas and transportation nodes, especially if the American cityscape is used as point of departure. It is therefore no small wonder that one of outdoor advertising's most common traits, the creation of monetary wealth, is also reflected by modern vernacular design in general. The *values, dreams, and aspirations of major portions of our heterogeneous culture*, as portrayed by modern vernacular expressions, are totally overwhelmed and dominated by economic forces and *corporate influences*. Modern vernacular expressions leave very little room for reflecting other values and forces such as environmental awareness, placeness, cultural identity and self-esteem of communities. Almost no opportunity is given for the visual expression of such values and forces in order for the landscape to be able to more honestly reflect a broader variety of underlying forces to which it should respond. All higher values, dreams and aspirations are literally covered by a vernacular veneer of commercialism, materialism and monetary wealth on which vernacular culture is based. In a modern world with increasing environmental awareness, environmental self-regulation or co-regulation by corporate institutions and an ever-increasing number of international environmental treaties such an approach is unthinkable. The dominance of this materialistic attitude in modern vernacular expressions is authenticated even



further by the works of prominent architects such as Robert Venturi and Jean Nouvel, who make use of such materialistic symbolism as a source of inspiration in the grand tradition of design.

In contrast to vernacular design in a traditional sense, modern vernacular design tends to have a negative and contrasting influence on the visual environment. Traditional vernacular design is characterised by an inherent placeness due to the quality of *unity with variety, theme with variation (or) order with a healthy hint of spontaneity* (Motloch, 1991, p. 133). This quality was possible in the past due to certain limitations placed on traditional building style, such as closed communities within limited geographical areas, limited technology and a limited range of materials. Modern vernacular design and expression have lost all unity and have become swamped by detail and variety due to advanced technology, a large assortment of materials and prefabricated units aimed at instant construction, and hordes of gaudy advertisements and signs.

Modern vernacular design and expression therefore tend to destroy placeness and promote a uniform world culture and uniform visual environments of disharmony based on materialistic values. By symbolising monetary wealth it also supports and promotes unsustainable consumption and production patterns. These problems can be aggravated to a large extent by giving too much recognition to the modern commercial vernacular environment by means of expressing such elements through the grand tradition of architecture.

An almost unlimited choice with regard to technology and materials in modern society is inherent to the whole problem of visual disharmony in both the vernacular and grand traditions of design. Blake (1979, p.156) describes this problem of visual vandalism as follows:

*The affluent society has many blessings, we are told, but it also contains within it the seeds of vandalism: for the first time in the history of mankind, we have complete and unrestricted freedom of esthetic choice! We can build anything, make anything, design anything, put it anywhere! Moreover, we can build, make, or design everything (so we tell ourselves) in such a way that it will be entirely different from everything else now extant on the face of the earth! The frantic search for novelty (for the sake of novelty) is encouraged by all the pressures that surround us: publications and other communications media are, by definition, dedicated to "news"; so that the successful*



*writer, designer, musician, movie maker or artist is not the one who pursues quality, but the one who pursues and captures novelty... All freedoms first lead to such abuses, of course: revolutions lead to indiscriminate bloodbaths - and our new, unlimited freedom of choice in material and esthetic things has led to indiscriminate vandalism. Yet the essence of all great art of all great periods of civilization has been the precise opposite: restraint, either self-imposed or, more frequently, imposed by economic or technical limitations.*

The developing communities of the Third World are especially eager to accept a greater recognition of modern vernacular design and the razzle-dazzle of the American way of life since such environments symbolise progress, civilisation and economic prosperity. Since most developing communities are in a survival situation the values of such communities are very susceptible to economic forces and influences. The United States is seen as a world leader and role model by such communities and a life of material abundance as represented by American society is pursued in all earnest by developing communities. The United States of America can be seen as the exporter of cheap commercial vernacular architecture and design elements, including billboard structures and outdoor advertising trends, together with a supplementary materialistic mindset by means of economic globalisation, cultural imperialism or vernacular imperialism. Higher values and environmental lessons learned by First World countries are not recognised easily by Third World communities. This is understandable since the United States, which serves as role model, does not have a very good environmental record and the typical modern vernacular expression, which portrays the values and aspirations of modern society, excludes such higher values.

The large-scale acceptance of modern vernacular expressions is especially a problem in countries such as South Africa with both First World and Third World components. The First World component provides the mechanism for economic growth and a ready channel for transferring American commercial vernacular expressions, while the Third World component provides the ready acceptance of such expressions by means of large numbers of consumers.

The ready acceptance of modern vernacular design and architecture in developing communities impedes the effective management of visual resource in such communities, which includes the

effective control of advertisements and signs. Since excessive advertisements and signs are seen as one of the main building blocks of modern vernacular expression, the effective control of advertisements and signs could be interpreted as contrary to the needs, desires and values of such developing communities. This situation can very easily be exploited by the outdoor advertising industry.

### 3.3.3 ETHICAL OR MORAL IMPACT

Ethical impact occurs when the content of outdoor information transfer is objectionable, indecent or prejudicial to the public morals and values. Outdoor advertising has a larger inherent potential to impact on public morals than the other advertising media due to fact that it cannot be avoided, ignored, covered or switched off, which also means that children cannot be protected sufficiently from such advertisements (cf. Office of Women's Policy, p. 5). Schmio Awards (online) has put it this way: *Billboards are the most intrusive kind of advertising. Even unwilling adults cannot avoid them or turn them off to protect children from inappropriate or damaging messages.* The United States Supreme Court observed as follows [Packer Corp. v. Utah, 285 U.S. 105, 110, 52 S.Ct. 273, 274]:

*Billboards, ... placards and such are a class by themselves... Other forms of advertising are ordinarily seen as a matter of choice on the part of the observer. The young people as well as the adults have the message of the billboard thrust upon them by all the arts and devices that skill can produce. In the case of newspapers and magazines, there must be some seeking by the one who is to see and read the advertisement. The radio can be turned off, but not so the billboard* (Floyd, online).

By revealing the objectionable, indecent and prejudicial in public such effects are amplified. It will therefore give offence, become degrading and evoke public reaction much sooner than advertisements with similar contents displayed in most other media, where the objectionable, indecent and prejudicial are cloaked to a certain extent by the privacy of the home. The obtrusive and public character of outdoor advertising is recognised by the *Advertising Standards Authority (ASA)* of the United Kingdom, which regulates advertising in the public interest through a system of self-regulation. Mention is made in their 2000 Annual Report of a *Yves Saint Laurent* perfume poster

which was ordered to be taken down because of its sexually suggestive nature. However, the ASA ruled that the same image was acceptable in newspapers and magazines (ASA, online).

Due to outdoor advertising's huge public audience and obtrusive nature, offensive advertisements might cause unacceptably high moral impacts before steps can be taken to remove such advertisements. Effective controlling measures are therefore necessary. After *French Connection* used an anagram of the f-word in outdoor advertising and *Yves Saint Laurent* displayed a sexually explicit advertisement on billboards these companies were ordered by the Advertising Standards Authority of the UK to submit all future posters for prior approval, effectively telling these companies that they could not be trusted to keep the industry's codes (Douglas, online). However, more localised advertisements which do not involve companies or advertising agencies cannot be controlled effectively by self-regulatory bodies. Even local authorities might find it difficult to control localised offensive advertisements of a highly mobile or temporary nature. This may include outdoor advertising gimmicks such as a lass wearing a scanty bikini inside a see-through bath on top of a bakkie (pick-up) being driven through peak-hour traffic in Johannesburg (The Star, 1998, March 19) or a nude male person forming part of a live billboard along a busy road in Pretoria. (Pretoria News, 1998, October 20). Such advertisements therefore enhance the inherent potential of outdoor advertising to impact on public morals.

The large degree of subjectivity involved in evaluating indecency and prejudice and dissimilarities in moral values is another factor that impedes the effective control of elements of indecency and prejudice in outdoor information transfer. For example, *The Atlanta Journal Constitution* of November 3, 1998 reported on a Georgia Supreme Court ruling that found a state law prohibiting highway billboards that advertise nude clubs and adult entertainment unconstitutional because it violates the rights to freedom of speech. Certain groups might therefore be subjected to indecent and prejudicial outdoor information transfer messages against their will while the same messages might not offend other groups or might be seen as an expression of freedom of speech by such other groups.

Advertising's impact in the ethical realm should not be underestimated. Independent research carried out in May 1998 for the *Advertising Standards Authority* (UK) revealed a hardening in UK consumer attitudes in taste and decency since the previous survey conducted in 1996-7. Concern about the

portrayal of women as sex objects in advertising has increased to 71% of the respondents, 53% were sensitive about the portrayal of men, almost 80% were concerned about disrespectful religious references, while 81% objected strongly to profanity in advertising (ASA of SA, 1999). And in Italy a group of celebrities, politicians and business leaders signed their names to a *declaration of discomfort* over the nudity proliferating Italy's media, which included outdoor media (Pretoria News, 1998, August 21). Owing to its obtrusive and highly visible character, outdoor advertising attracts relatively large numbers of complaints. In 2000 outdoor advertising attracted the second highest number of complaints received by the *Advertising Standards Bureau of Australia* (18,66%) following television (71,87%) (ASB, online). In the United Kingdom posters were responsible for the highest number of complaints (21,46%) received by the Advertising Standards Authority for the same year, followed by the national press (17,64%) (ASA, online). However, the broadcast media are not covered by the ASA. It is noteworthy that in both cases outdoor advertising elicited more complaints than the printed media.

The exposure of children to outdoor advertising messages glamourising tobacco and alcohol is a matter of great ethical concern in many countries and communities. In the United States of America studies have repeatedly documented the disproportionately high concentration of billboards advertising such products in low-income African-American and Latino communities, near homes, schools, playgrounds and other places where children congregate (Schmio Awards, online). It seems as if community action in the USA against billboards advertising tobacco and alcohol products was more successful than actions against billboards containing elements of indecency. Various local jurisdictions took measures to restrict alcohol and tobacco billboard advertising. This movement was activated by a 1996 US Court of Appeals decision upholding a Baltimore ordinance that removed alcohol and tobacco billboards in areas where children are likely to gather (Schmio Awards, online). The problem of tobacco advertising through the outdoor advertising medium was solved to a certain extent by the *Master Settlement Agreement* of 1998, a legal agreement between 46 states and the major tobacco companies, according to which all tobacco advertisements on billboards had to be removed before 23 April 1999. However, the *Master Settlement Agreement* still permits outdoor and externally visible tobacco advertisements at any point that manufactures or sells tobacco products, including those near schools and playgrounds. A study undertaken by the University of Illinois at Chicago (Wakefield *et al.*, 2000) indicated that tobacco companies have significantly increased retail



Scenic America - Photogallery  
<http://www.scenic.org/photos.htm>

Citizens for a Scenic Florida  
<http://www.scenicflorida.org>



Scenic America - Photogallery  
<http://www.scenic.org/photos.htm>



Scenic America - Photogallery  
<http://www.scenic.org/photos.htm>



moral impact of outdoor information transfer refers to the effects of outdoor information transfer being objectionable, offensive or prejudicial to public values. Outdoor advertising has a greater inherent potential to impact on public morals than the other advertising media due to the fact that it cannot be avoided, hidden, covered or switched off, which also means that children cannot be protected from such advertisements.

The billboard in the top left photograph advocates the virtues of the establishment of a somewhat dubious character, while the impact on morality is reflected by the irony in the messages conveyed by the other photographs: Top right - the directional sign in the lower right-hand corner indicates a possible solution to overindulgence in worldly pleasures; bottom right - a billboard denounces smoking at the same time; bottom left - a billboard promotes the educational value of outdoor advertising.

Figure 3.25

### The moral impact of outdoor information transfer

store advertising and promotion since the ban on tobacco billboard advertising took effect. The study showed a 9% increase in stores with exterior tobacco advertising and a 21% increase in stores with a high level of exterior advertising.

Owing to the public nature of outdoor advertising, gender-related imagery has also become a contentious issue in recent times. In reporting to the Minister for Women's Affairs of the Australian State of Victoria, the Portrayal of Women Advisory Committee identified the following issues regarding the portrayal of women in outdoor advertising:

- The stereotyping of female images in outdoor advertising: According to market research undertaken by NFO CM Research for the Committee, only 17 % of females and 35 % of males agreed that sufficient examples of women of different shapes and sizes were used in outdoor advertising (Office of Women's Policy, p.5).
- The association of women with sex, as sexual objects and/or as sexually available: As can be expected, female market research respondents felt more strongly about this point than male respondents, as reflected by the 62 % of female as opposed to 44 % of male respondents who objected to women in sexually provocative positions. Furthermore, 61 % of female as opposed to 27 % of male respondents indicated that they wanted to see fewer outdoor advertisements with partially clothed women (Office of Women's Policy, p.6).
- Encouraging negative views of women's status in society: According to the above-mentioned market research the majority of female (72 %) and male (64 %) respondents agreed that the volume and type of imagery of women used in outdoor advertisements can influence the way men view women. Furthermore, 58 % of female and 46 % of male respondents agreed that outdoor advertisements do not reflect the contribution women make to society (Office of Women's Policy, p.6).
- Impacting on self-esteem: Women are pressured to try to achieve unrealistic goals in relation to their appearance, particularly their weight. This leads to feelings of inadequacy, anxiety and poor self-esteem. A relation may also exist between eating disorders, particularly among young

women and girls, and unrealistic images of women used in advertising. The majority of female (69 %) and male (57 %) respondents involved in the market research agreed that the volume and type of imagery of women used in outdoor advertising has, over time, impacted on the way women see themselves. Furthermore, 51 % of female respondents and 39 % of male respondents were concerned about the impact of outdoor advertising on young women (Office of Women's Policy, p.7).

### 3.3.4 UNSUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION PATTERNS

Advertising may lead to unsustainable consumption patterns, which impacts at the social, economic and ecological levels. In modern society commercial advertising is promoting a lifestyle based on material wealth and a growing consumption of products and services. It tends to emphasise the *positive* or desirable aspects of consumption while deliberately ignoring the negative aspects of both consumption and production. Advertisements link the product with a socially desirable referent system. Acquiring a specific product will lead to the acquisition of certain valued meanings or goals, such as social acceptance.

According to Kalle Lasn, founder of the anti-consumerism group *Media Foundation*, over-consumption may be seen as the mother of all environmental problems, but the advertising industry should be seen as the father (Geary, 1997, p.70).

The developed countries of the North are currently drowning in a sea of advertisements aimed at stimulating the sale of products and services. The average North American is bombarded by more than 3 000 marketing messages a day (Geary, 1997, p.70). This deluge of advertisements, aimed at creating artificial wants instead of meeting people's needs, impact on the social environment by contributing to overspending, personal debts and strained human relationships. In extreme cases overspending finds expression in compulsive shopping and irrational purchasing. According to researchers this phenomenon can be seen as a psychiatric disorder, with conclusive evidence that it can even be considered a form of addiction (Day, 1997, p.22).



The promotion of products such as tobacco and alcohol has a high social and economic impact owing to their hazardous effects on human health. Especially tobacco, which drains society economically through the high health care cost of smoking-related diseases, the effects of passive smoking and even lost productivity due to early deaths (Bartecchi *et al.*, 1995).

As consumer patterns in the developed countries of the North become more environmentally friendly, sustainable and health-conscious, unhealthy, unsustainable and unrealistic consumer patterns are progressively transferred to developing countries in the South by means of aggressive advertising.

Such advertising campaigns *portray unrealistic lifestyles, creating a thirst for Western luxuries that drains these regions of hundreds of millions of dollars that could go into grassroots development... Consumption trends in the South are moving in exactly the opposite direction of the planet's environmental needs and development priorities. They are fuelled by massive advertising for the usually unnecessary and sometimes harmful products of northern multinationals...* (Pradervand, 1992, p.76).

Cigarette sales can be seen as the archetypal example of the promotion of unneeded, indeed lethal, consumption goods in the South. As cigarette sales slump in the industrialised North, tobacco companies look to the South. According to the Pradervands (1992, p.77), one of the most disturbing effects of the promotion of Western consumption goods in Africa is the replacement of inexpensive, traditional, frequently healthy forms of consumption by more attractive but less suitable and usually more expensive Western alternatives.

Outdoor advertising *per se* can make an important contribution in promoting unsustainable and unhealthy consumption patterns. This is clearly illustrated by the important role outdoor advertising played in the USA with regard to tobacco-related advertising from the 1970s to the 1990s. After Congress banned all cigarette advertising on electronic media in 1971, such advertising shifted from television and radio to magazines, newspapers and billboards (Bartecchi *et al.*, 1995, p. 29). By the 1980s a third of all outdoor advertising in the United States was for tobacco products. (Saturday Business Report, 1999, April 24). However, in terms of the *Master Settlement Agreement* between 46 states and the major tobacco companies, all tobacco advertisements on billboards had to be removed as from 23 April 1999 (Advocacy Institute, online; Saturday Business Report, 1999, April 24).

Outdoor advertising is also a primary advertising medium in developing communities which are very susceptible to unsustainable consumption patterns. Although developing communities may very quickly develop a taste for the luxuries of the Western World and may very easily conform to westernised consumption patterns, most of these communities have not yet developed a social conscience and a sense of environmental responsibility and do not have the means to implement environmentally corrective measures that should go with such consumption patterns.

### 3.3.5 IMPACT ON TOURISM RESOURCES AND UNFRIENDLY TOURIST AND RETAIL ENVIRONMENTS

Today the tourism industry is one of the most important contributors to economic development. It is also one of the worlds biggest and fastest creators of employment. According to the *World Travel and Tourism Council* (WTTC, undated) the travel and tourism industry created 192 million jobs world-wide in the year 2000. According to estimates this figure will rise to 251 million jobs within a decade, which means at least one in twelve of the global total. In Hawaii the travel and tourism economy was expected to contribute 27,8% to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 31,6% to employment in 1998. According to estimates these figures would rise to 32,2% and 37,8% respectively within the next decade (WTTC, 1998, p.1). In the Southern African Development Community the travel and tourism economy contributed 20,9% to the GDP of Namibia and 27,9% to that of Mauritius in 1999. The corresponding contributions to employment were 15,1% and 20,6%. The travel and tourism economy contributed only 8,2% to South Africa's GDP and 7,3% to employment. However, South Africa has the biggest travel and tourism economy in the region, which stood at US\$ 9billion in 1999 (WTTC, 1999, pp.4-5). Travel and tourism can make a much more important contribution to South Africa's economy in the future. This must be seen in the light of this country's huge tourism potential due to its diversity in landscapes, cultures, fauna and flora. The South African government has committed itself to tourism development as a priority. Opening Parliament in the year 2000 President Thabo Mbeki told the nation that:

*Consistent with the decisions taken at the Job Summit, both public and private sectors have committed the necessary funds for the promotion of the tourism sector, commonly accepted as potentially the most important sector with regard to job creation. Work has therefore begun to vigorously promote the growth of this sector.*

Photo date: December 2000



Photo date: December 2000



**Figure 3.26**  
**Impact on tourism**  
**resources**

Outdoor information transfer may have a very negative impact on tourism resources, as illustrated by the photographs on this page.

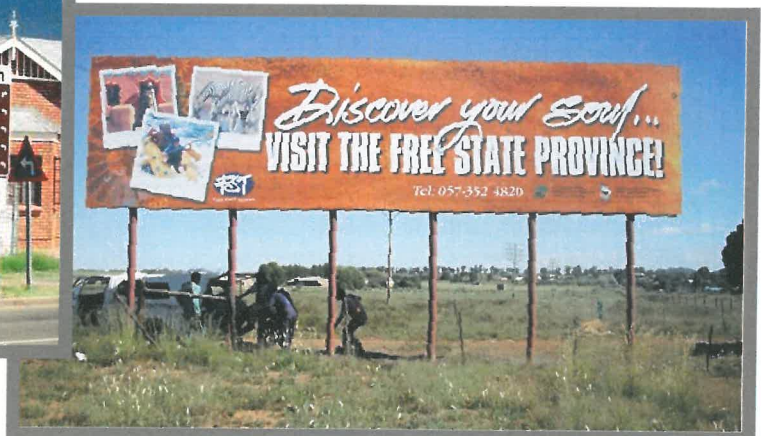
Beaufort West is a very important stopover for the tourist travelling on the N1 to Cape Town. A proliferation of signs at the entrance of this town (top left and right) tries to convince the tourist to stay longer and spend more. However, the untidy and unfriendly atmosphere created by these signs might rather have the opposite effect, *forcing* the visitor to limit his stay to the absolute minimum.

Outdoor information transfer might have a diverse impact on tourism resources. Obstructing scenic views (left) or impacting on cultural resources, as is illustrated by the sign proliferation at the entrance to the Big Hole, one of Kimberley's most important tourist attractions (bottom left). Tourism campaigns might even be self-destructive destroying their own resources (bottom right).

eric America - Photogallery  
[www.scenic.org/photos.htm](http://www.scenic.org/photos.htm)



Photo date: December 1999



South African National Roads Agency

The proliferation of advertisements and signs may have a very negative impact on visual resources such as scenic landscapes and cultural streetscapes, which constitute major tourist attractions. However, the impact of outdoor information transfer is not limited to such outstanding attractions since the visual environment also forms a backdrop to most other tourist activities such as game watching, touring, entertainment, shopping and sport. The visual environment can be seen as the fabric that gives meaning and substance to any tourism experience. Each country, area, city or town has its own unique visual character and atmosphere, which plays an important role in the quality of any tourist experience. Mark Twain (cited in Scenic America, online (3)) has described the value of urban character as follows: *We take stock of a city like we take stock of a man. The clothes or appearance are the externals by which we judge.* Due to the universal appearance of advertising structures and even advertising contents (product names, logos and image) outdoor information transfer tends to contribute to the loss of identity and the creation of a uniform world culture. This tendency can therefore be seen as a contribution to the destruction of the uniqueness of local landscapes and settings, which implies a diminishing in value as tourist attractions. Edward T. McMahon, Director, *American Greenways Program*, has expressed himself as follows in this regard: *The more a community comes to resemble "Anyplace, U.S.A.," the less reason there will be to visit* (Citizens for a Scenic Florida, online (1)).

Kimberley Fogle, Town Planning Director of Front Royal, Virginia, has made the following statement regarding billboards marring local character and tourism potential:

*The biggest tourism component today is heritage tourism. People are going to communities because they have a sense of character, they show their heritage. They provide people with new information about how other people live. The billboards detract from that* (The Warren Sentinel, 1999, February 18).

The juridical system in the United States has acknowledged the economic value of aesthetic resources for tourism as a justification for billboard regulation.

*Because this state [California] relies on its scenery to attract tourists and commerce, aesthetic considerations assume economic value. Consequently, any distinction between aesthetics and economic grounds as a justification for billboard regulation*

Date of photos: September 2000



**Figure 3.27**  
**Impact on tourism resources**  
**Table Mountain**

Date of photo: February 2002



Another good example of outdoor information transfer impacting on tourism resources. This is the tourist's first impression of Table Mountain, a world-renown landmark, when leaving Cape Town International Airport. The irony of the billboard message is clear ... it should have rather read – *Welcome to Cape Town, where a cloud covers the top of the mountain and Vodacom covers the rest of the mountain.*

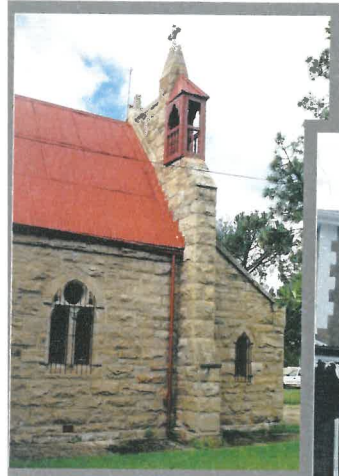
*must fail* (Metromedia, Inc. v. City of San Diego, 610 P.2d 407, 413 (Cal. 1980), rev'd on other grounds, 453 U.S. 490 (1981) cited in Citizens for a Scenic Florida, online (1)).

A strong indication exists that the effective management of billboards has a positive influence on the popularity of tourist destinations. A survey involving 13 500 travellers ranked America's top ten tourist destinations. Hawaii and Alaska were placed first and second. Both states have banned and removed all billboards. Other states ranked in the top ten were Vermont, Maine (both billboard free), Oregon, Washington, Northern California, Colorado and Arizona (all with strict limitations on billboards or having hardly any billboards) (Scenic Missouri, online).

Billboard-free Vermont enjoyed a 50% rise in tourism expenditure in the two years after removing its last billboard, while the number of visitors rose by nearly 10%. According to Lymon Orton, Vermont store owner:

*The billboard ban provided not only a level playing field for all of us, it opened the roadways to scenic vistas and created more than compensating publicity... The absence of billboards in Vermont is the best billboard of all for the tourist business* (Scenic America, online (1)).

The proliferation of advertisements and signs may have a very negative impact on retail business by creating psychological environments not conducive to shopping. This principle is recognised by the *City Council of Westminster*, which aims to obtain shopping street character and atmosphere that would be conducive to trade and attract local, national and international shoppers. A high premium is placed on the recreation of streets with a historical appearance, and shopping streets like Regent and Oxford Street can be seen as tourist attractions of world renown. Shop signs as an integral part of shopfronts are seen as an important element in creating the desired shopping street atmosphere. If not managed properly, advertisements and signs might, however, have a severe and detrimental effect on the streetscape and may cause shopping streets to lose their commercial viability. It is the total streetscape that attracts shoppers and not the appearance of individual shops or the prominence of individual shop signs.



**Figure 3.28**  
**Impact on tourism resources**  
**Cathcart and Hogsback**

Cathcart in the Eastern Cape is a small rural town with various historical sandstone buildings (centre left and right), a strong sense of place and a large tourism potential. Unfortunately, a collection of very unattractive signs at the entrance to the historical town centre is quite detrimental to both sense of place and tourism potential (top).

A repetition of the same problem (bottom right) in Hogsback, a very attractive mountain village in the Eastern Cape (bottom left).



*Making a shop “stand out” in the context of the street, does not always make it more attractive to shoppers. Evident respect for the character of the street and the area, will generally produce a high quality retail environment which is likely to attract more shoppers* (City Council of Westminster, 1993, p. 16).

Edward T. McMahon, Director of the *American Greenways Program*, has made the following statement in this regard:

*A good sign code is pro-business, since an attractive business district will attract more customers than an ugly one. Moreover, when signs are controlled, merchants do a better job of selling, and at less cost* (Citizens for a Scenic Florida (1), p.7).

The proliferation of signs and advertisements may contribute to the run-down appearance of retail districts such as city centres and create a feeling of insecurity, which is not conducive to tourism and retail spending. In South Africa with its high crime rate this is a very important factor. The government of Singapore has taken the principle of creating a psychological atmosphere conducive to shopping even further by applying it on a city-wide scale and to trade and investment in general. Almost no advertisements are allowed in Singapore, even in industrial areas, in accordance with Singapore's *clean and green* image, in order to attract international investments. Strict control is exercised with regard to shop signs (URA).

### 3.3.6 IMPACT ON TRAFFIC SAFETY AND TRAFFIC FLOW

#### 3.3.6.1 Detrimental effects of outdoor information transfer

Outdoor information transfer may have the following detrimental effects regarding traffic safety and traffic flow:

- ❑ Distracting the attention of the motorist
- ❑ Interfering and creating confusion with traffic signals, traffic signs and road markings
- ❑ Obstructing the view of the motorist
- ❑ Forming physical obstructions
- ❑ Billboards and signs hitting pedestrians, cyclists and motorists



- Impairing traffic flow

### (a) Distracting the attention of the motorist

This issue has been the main focus of the controversy surrounding traffic safety and outdoor advertising.

By their very nature outdoor advertisements are designed to pull the eyes of the motorist off the road and onto roadside displays. In order to achieve maximum exposure, outdoor advertisements are placed in locations that are highly perceivable, but which also require special attention from the driver and are critical from a traffic safety point of view, such as bends in the road and intersections. The *Institute of Outdoor Advertising* (USA) itself has admitted that outdoor advertising has a distracting influence by stating:

*Outdoor's sheer physical size allows for eye stopping, bigger-than-life illustrations. It is virtually impossible not to notice the world's biggest scoop of ice cream or shiny automobile. At night a billboard encounters no other visual to compete with the motorist's attention. There is only eye stopping visual display emblazoned across the sky* (Scenic Missouri, online).

In the United States federal and state courts have for long cited traffic safety as a legitimate basis for billboard regulation. The following serves as examples in this regard: (Scenic Missouri, online)

- In *Major Media of the Southeast v. City of Raleigh* (1987) the U.S. Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals said:

*... no empirical studies are necessary for reasonable people to conclude that billboards pose a traffic hazard, since by their very nature they are designed to distract drivers and their passengers from maintaining their view on the road.*

- Likewise, in *Metromedia v. San Diego* the California Supreme Court said: *We hold as a matter of law that an ordinance which eliminates billboards designed to be viewed from streets and highways reasonably relates to traffic safety.*



**Figure 3.29**  
**Impact on traffic safety**  
**Distracting the attention of the motorist**

Outdoor advertising creates a traffic safety hazard by distracting the attention of the motorist. By their very nature outdoor advertisements are designed to draw the eyes of the motorist off the road and onto roadside displays. In order to compete with other advertisements even more effective techniques are used to attract the attention of the motorist, such as making use of graphics displaying scantily clothed female figures.

Outdoor advertising may also contribute to information overload in roadside environments, which may have a very negative influence on driver attention. In the same manner as information overload interferes with aesthetic perception it also interferes with the information processing system of the driver. According to Bergeron (1996, cited in Van Schalkwyk & Visser, 2001, p.4), the driver's visual information processing capacity is limited and therefore a visual environment that contains too many stimuli creates visual confusion and causes driver error. An excessive information load impairs the information processing system and, as a direct result, the driver *loses control over the perceptive information he(/she) is receiving, the attention resources are exhausted and his(/her) sensor-motor and decisional performance may deteriorate, increasing the likelihood of an accident generating situation* (Bergeron 1996, cited in Van Schalkwyk & Visser, 2001, p.4).

Various studies have been undertaken regarding the distraction effect of larger commercial signs along the road. A large number of these studies indicated a definite correlation between accidents and the presence of roadside advertising (Minnesota Department of Highways, 1951; Rusch, 1951; Madigan-Hyland, 1963; Faustman, DJ, 1961; Weiner, 1973; Holahan *et al.*, 1978, Jan.; Holahan *et al.*, 1978; Stanway Edwards, 1995). These studies have received varying amounts of criticism regarding research methodology and statistical analysis. However, when studies finding no significant correlation between accidents and roadside advertising (Michigan State Highway Department, 1952; Lauer and McMonagle, 1955; Blanche, undated) were exposed to the same critical review they did even worse. According to Wachtel and Netherton (1980, pp.25-6), the Lauer and McMonagle study was, for instance, *so fraught with errors of conception and execution that it sheds no real light on the relationships between roadside advertising... and traffic safety, and any such conclusions may be unjustified*. Another study finding no correlation, the Blanche study, was also discredited since it seemed obvious that this study was undertaken to disprove the findings of the Madigan-Hyland study, which came to the opposite conclusion. An *a priori* bias on the part of the researchers seems a very strong possibility due to an alluded sponsorship by the Outdoor Advertising Association of America and the fact that Blanche only referred to previous studies indicating no correlation between advertising and accidents while ignoring studies proving the opposite (Wachtel & Netherton, 1980, p.28). On the other hand the Faustman study, statistically reanalysed by Weiner, which found a definite correlation, can be seen as one of the most reliable studies on the subject. According to

Wachtel and Netherton (1980, p.30) Weiner's findings were based on a sophisticated statistical analysis of data collected by Faustman *under field conditions which were perhaps the best controlled of any of the reported studies on the subject of billboards and accidents*. Both the Faustman and Weiner reports *have received no comment or criticism in the substantial body of literature that continues to grow on the subject*.

An objective review of the above studies seems to favour a definite correlation between accidents and advertising signs along roadways. It must also be borne in mind that most of the above studies were undertaken a very long time ago, before the 1980s and mainly during the 1950s and 1960s, involving only ordinary billboards at the side of the road. Outdoor advertising has changed drastically from the billboard of the fifties and sixties. Nowadays variable message signs and other techniques and technologies are becoming more and more sophisticated, eye-catching and distracting, therefore making the correlation between accidents and outdoor advertising an even stronger possibility. Furthermore, the ordinary study on advertising and road accidents cannot take all factors into consideration. Factors such as the effect of advertisements in motion and advertising messages evoking a response from the observer and therefore enhancing the distraction effect, such as making a phone call or writing down a phone number while driving, are ignored in most cases.

It should be accepted that there never will be a research study that is infallible and free of criticism owing to the large number of variables to be taken into consideration. According to various researchers, determining the effect of roadside advertising on road safety is a difficult endeavour, owing to several theoretical and methodological reasons and to the variation in driver characteristics and driving environments, including variation and technological progress in advertisement types (Farbry *et al.*, 2001, p.8; Van Schalkwyk & Visser, 2001, p.3). There will therefore always be enough material to keep the controversy regarding road accidents and outdoor advertising alive. However, it cannot be denied, that due to the distracting characteristics of outdoor advertising, it has an inherent potential to reduce the safety of the road environment, but according to Van Schalkwyk and Visser (2001, p.15), *there are specific elements in each case that will increase the risk or reduce it to insignificant levels. [The] active regulation of outdoor advertising is [therefore] essential to ensure that [road] safety ... is not compromised*. It seems only logical that in the absence of effective control, accidents will happen and a *significant* correlation between accidents and roadside advertising will

exist. In the absence of effective control measures more and more advertising contractors will go to extremes in order to get on top of competitors, while the boundaries of extremity will be shifted further and further due to the inherent mechanism and characteristics of outdoor advertisements and signs (see 3.3.1). The following *extremities* serve as examples of very imaginative advertising stunts, but also sure recipes for causing accidents:

- ❑ Two fellows in mouse suits on motorbikes, pursuing in all earnest a big chunk of cheese on a trailer towed by a bakkie (pickup) on the Ben Schoeman, South Africa's busiest stretch of highway.
- ❑ A pair of naked and very shapely legs sticking out of the side window of a Volkswagen Beetle on an advertising trailer parked along a busy road in Sandton near Johannesburg (Beeld, 1999, Augustus 20).
- ❑ An advertising trailer carrying an advertisement for an *adult* magazine which does not leave much to both the adult and juvenile imagination, being towed through peak hour traffic.
- ❑ A very attractive and shapely lass, in a bathing costume (fortunately), showering in public, at the entrance of the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront in Cape Town. This one did cause an accident just before the advertising trailer and mobile shower could be towed away by the traffic authorities (Beeld, 1999, Augustus 19).

### **(b) Interfering and creating confusion with traffic signals, traffic signs and road markings**

The driver may be confused by advertisements and signs on or at traffic signs or signals. The written messages, images or colours of such advertisements may be of such an eye-catching nature that they simply overawe drivers and override the messages conveyed by traffic signs and signals. Such advertisements may even physically conceal traffic signs and signals. The colours red, green and amber displayed in advertisements close to traffic signals have a very high potential for confusing motorists, or even advertisements carrying colours corresponding to the colours of traffic signs.

## Figure 3.30

### Impact on traffic safety

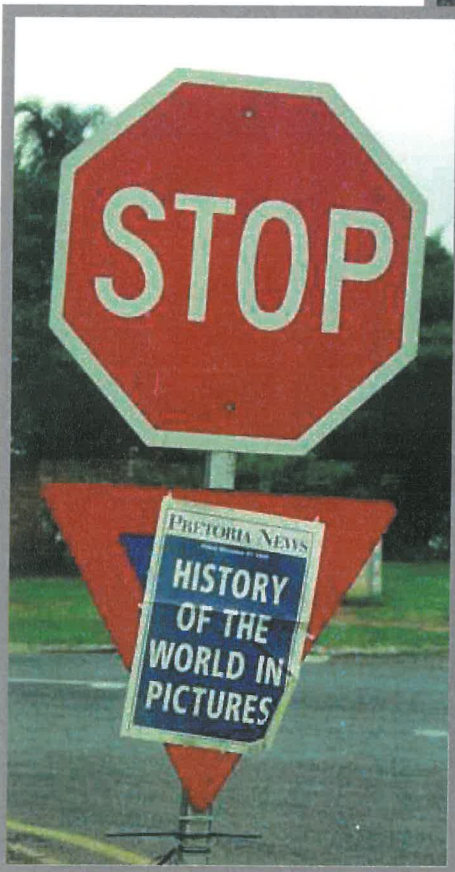
Interfering and creating confusion with traffic signals,  
traffic signs and road markings



Date of photo: 1993



Date of photos: 1999



The driver of a motor vehicle may be confused by advertisements and signs on or at traffic signs and signals. In many South African towns and cities it is still common though illegal practice to attach posters to traffic signs (bottom right). In some cases the poster may even obstruct the traffic sign (bottom left). Confusion may also be created by using images of traffic signs as part of an advertisement. (top).

In many South African towns and cities it still is common though illegal practice to attach advertising posters to traffic signs. A lot of advertisers and poster manufacturers do not see anything wrong with attaching posters to traffic signal and traffic sign poles. It seems as if the average advertiser rather considers traffic signs as convenient structures provided by their local authority for the main purpose of promoting poster displays. In a letter to various organs of state *Citizen's Revolt Against Poster Pollution (CRAPP)* complained against the proliferation of outdoor advertisements in the Greater Johannesburg area, which includes *the ever increasing erection of posters on electricity poles, traffic lights, stop signs, trees, etc.* (The Urban Green File, 2000 March/April, p.2). Philip Lloyd (1996, p.66), columnist in the *Engineering News*, has put it this way:

*Virtually every vertical surface for miles around carries a commercial message. ... Traffic lights and stop signs used to be sacrosanct, but no longer are. Even a flashing warning light at a nearby dangerous intersection bears a load heavy enough to bent the pole.*

And in Pretoria a resident complained about *advertising that is displayed on every single pole that is available – including every traffic sign pole, that is essential to the safety of all the residents, particularly our children who make use of crossings controlled by stop and yield signs.* (Record East, 1998 August 28 (1)). A certain poster manufacturer has even argued that since traffic signs, carrying the main colour red, are often displayed close to traffic signals there can be no moral grounds for banning poster displays carrying the main colours green, red or amber, close to or even very close to traffic signals (Personal communication).

Another problem experienced in South Africa is large advertising trailers parked close to intersections and thereby concealing traffic signs or signals. In certain cases advertising signs also imitate traffic signs such as stop or yield signs in order to attract attention, contributing to confusion.

### **(c) Obstructing the view and impairing the vision of the motorist**

Posters, advertising signs, trailers or other mobile displays may obstruct the view of the motorist with regard to other vehicular traffic, the roadway, cyclists or pedestrians. (Rekord-Oos, 1997, Maart 14 (2); 1997, Oktober 31). This may create a serious traffic safety hazard at stop streets and intersections (Record East, 1998 August 28 (2)).

Illuminated signs have the potential to blind or dazzle the road user. In other words it may lead to disability or discomfort glare. Disability glare refers to reduced visual capability resulting from one or more light sources in the visual field. Discomfort glare refers to visual discomfort as a result of exposure to bright light. In contrast to disability glare, which reduces the detection of objects, discomfort glare is normally only uncomfortable, but high levels and long exposure will increase fatigue (Van Schalkwyk & Visser, 2001, p.5).

#### **(d) Forming physical obstructions**

Posters, advertising trailers and other advertisements displayed on sidewalks and cycle paths pose a danger to cyclist who, having to swerve in order to avoid these obstacles, may end up in front of vehicular traffic (Rekord-Oos, 1997, Maart 14 (2)). A reader writing to the *Rekord-Oos* (1997 Maart 14 (2)), a Pretoria community paper, complained about very nearly running over a youngster who, in order to avoid an advertising sign attached to a road sign, did exactly that.

In most South African towns and cities estate agents' boards are not only allowed at the actual property to be rented or sold, but pointer boards are also allowed to direct potential buyers from main roads to show houses over weekends. Although a limited number of boards per agent is normally allowed, this practice leads to the excessive proliferation of boards at certain spots due to control measures being applied inadequately in many instances. In order to attract more clients by creating a perception that their company is really active, some agents are erecting as many boards as possible at one point. Estate agents' boards, attached to iron rods knocked into the ground, not only make certain pavement sections impossible to walk on (The Star 1996, March 25), forcing pedestrians onto the roadway, but also pose a serious hazard to joggers after dark.

Larger outdoor advertisements supported by substantial structures along highways pose a hazard due to the fact that such structures might be hit when a vehicle leaves the roadway during an accident.



### (e) Billboards and signs hitting pedestrians, cyclists and motorists

Inadequate structures and fixtures may lead to billboards and signs coming down and injuring passers-by.

In Cape Town a tourist from Gauteng had to be taken to hospital after an advertising board blown down by the notorious South Easter landed on top of her (Die Burger, 1997, Desember 23), while in New York public outrage over outdoor advertising grew in 1999 after three women walking through Times Square were injured by falling vinyl signs (Cie zadlo, online). In Johannesburg one of the billboards along the M1 highway, advertising the *All Africa Games*, was blown over by a strong wind and hit a car on the highway (Beeld, 1999, Oktober 8). In another incident, along the Ben Schoeman highway close to Centurion, a strong wind folded down two massive billboards which fortunately did not land on the roadway (Pretoria News, 1997, December 29).

The above examples may be seen as a few isolated incidents, but with outdoor advertisements and signs increasing in size and numbers the increased incidence and seriousness of such accidents are becoming a stronger possibility.

Advertising trailers parked at the side of the road have a very high potential of being blown onto the road surface if not properly anchored and can therefore be a serious hazard to the motorist (cf. DEA&T, 1998, p.127, par.C(ii)).

### (f) Impairing traffic flow

Outdoor information transfer may also contribute to a breakdown in traffic flow and serious traffic congestion. According to traffic engineers, traffic on a freeway behaves much like a fluid in motion, transmitting shock waves of congestion far upstream from bottlenecks or points of disruption (Holmes, 1994, p.36). According to Holmes (1994, p.37), various studies by traffic researchers show that these moving shock waves can result from the most trifling causes. Apart from more obvious causes such as a slip-road feeding traffic onto an already crowded freeway, or physical obstructions such as a car accident or road repairs, breakdowns in traffic flow can also happen spontaneously,



caused by nothing more than clumsy driving, gawking at an accident or just daydreaming for a moment. Advertisements along freeways may constitute a serious source of distraction which may cause a driver to slow down significantly enough in order to provide the original stimulus for setting a shock wave of deceleration in motion. This is especially true in cases where motorists try to read too lengthy advertising messages, when an electronic variable message changes too suddenly, or when a driver tries to dial a number displayed on an advertisement or to write the number down. Traffic congestion may cause an escalation in air pollution, loss of production time and a lowering in productivity and quality of life through irritation and frustration.

### 3.3.6.2 Attitudes and perceptions of the road user

Visser (1997) undertook a nation-wide study on the road user’s attitudes and perceptions on outdoor advertising in South Africa. This also included attitudes and perceptions on traffic safety. Table 4 indicates that the respondents had a very negative perception of traffic safety in South Africa in general, which provided a reliable background for testing their perceptions of outdoor advertising and traffic safety.

**TABLE 4**  
**SOUTH AFRICAN ROAD USERS**  
**GENERAL PERCEPTION WITH REGARD TO ROAD SAFETY**

STATEMENT	AGREE	DISAGREE	NEUTRAL
South Africans drive safely	25,8%	54,4%	19,7%
We drive over the speed limit	81,1%	8,6%	10,4%
We maintain a two-second following distance	18,3%	69,8%	11,9%
We are aggressive drivers	72,8%	13,1%	14,0%

Source: Visser, 1997, pp.51-58



**TABLE 5**

**SOUTH AFRICAN ROAD USERS – NATURE OF OBSERVING OUTDOOR ADVERTISEMENTS**

ACTIVITY	YES	SOMETIMES	RARELY	NO
Usually observe advertisements at a glance	57,3%	28,7%	6,5%	7,5%
Try to read contents	15,7%	32,4%	15,2%	36,6%
Try to read each advertisement you pass	7,4%	10,0%	11,2%	71,3%
Reduce your speed to try and read the advertisement	7,1%	8,5%	9,2%	75,3%
Change lanes to read an advertisement	2,5%	3,6%	4,0%	89,9%

**Source: Visser, 1997, pp.58-66**

According to Table 5 outdoor advertisements do not influence the respondents' driving patterns as they do not look at outdoor advertisements in a manner that might be detrimental to traffic safety. With regard to the respondents' perspective on the impact of outdoor advertising on road safety, Table 6 shows somewhat contradicting results. On the one hand, respondents indicate that outdoor advertisements along freeways do not cause accidents and do not obstruct the visibility of traffic signs along freeways, but only by an average margin. On the other hand, the respondents indicate that outdoor advertisements distract the attention of the driver by a rather high margin. Respondents also indicate by an even higher margin that advertisements positioned on a curve or bend in the road are dangerous to the motorist and that variable message signs negatively influence a driver's concentration. There is also a discrepancy between the results of Table 5 and Table 6. According to Table 6 outdoor advertisements distract the attention of drivers, but the figures in Table 5 indicate that



drivers do not look at advertisements long enough for their attention to be distracted. One explanation for this discrepancy is that when questions are aimed directly at respondents they do not want to admit that they observe outdoor advertisements in a manner that might be detrimental to road safety, but when questions are not directly aimed at them they do admit that outdoor advertisements distract a driver's attention.

It might be concluded that South African road users feel, by a high margin, that outdoor advertisements have the potential to distract the attention of the driver, especially in certain circumstances, while a significant percentage also indicate that advertisements along freeways cause accidents and obstruct the visibility of traffic signs. This points to the conclusion that South African road users feel that outdoor advertisements are detrimental to road safety.

**TABLE 6**  
**SOUTH AFRICAN ROAD USERS – PERCEPTION TOWARDS IMPACT OF OUTDOOR**  
**ADVERTISING ON ROAD SAFETY**

STATEMENT	AGREE	DISAGREE	NEUTRAL
Advertisements obstruct the visibility of traffic signs along freeways	36,3%	48,3%	15,3%
Advertisements along freeways cause accidents	36,8%	47,3%	16,0%
Advertisements positioned on a curve or bend in the road, are dangerous to the motorist	80,8%	12,3%	7,0%
Advertising boards that change their messages every few seconds, negatively influence a driver's concentration	71,7%	17,6%	10,6%
Advertisements distract the driver's attention	58,6%	26,6%	14,8%

Source: Visser, 1997, pp.67-73

### 3.3.7 DIRECT ECOLOGICAL IMPACT

Although the direct ecological impact of outdoor information transfer seems insignificant compared to its impact on visual resources, such ecological impact cannot be ignored completely.

Vegetation may be damaged in the process of erecting billboard structures or in order to improve the visibility of such billboards. In the United States of America thousands of trees are destroyed each year in order to improve motorists' views of billboards. According to a 1986 report by the US General Accounting Office, over 1 100 trees were cut down in Louisiana to improve the visibility of billboards at just two different sites near a highway (Scenic America, online, (2)). Although billboards are located on private land, eighteen states permit or require that trees be cut on the public right-of-way to provide a clear view of such billboards (Floyd, online). The Florida Department of Transport formulated a rule that provides a 1 000 foot (305 metre) billboard viewing zone on each side of a billboard, which means a clear zone of over one third of a mile (two thirds of a kilometre) for each billboard (Florida Department of Transportation). In the event of adequate measures preventing the trimming or cutting of trees in the public right-of-way, illegal cutting or poisoning of trees often takes place. For example, in 1972 testimony was presented to the Commission on Highway Beautification by the Florida Department of Transportation which indicated that more than 1 500 trees had been destroyed illegally along I-75, all in front of billboards (Floyd, online). And at the beginning of 1998 a total of 81 loblolly pines and hardwood trees close to an exit near Cartersville, Georgia were chopped down or trimmed, apparently to make billboards advertising certain enterprises more visible to the passing motorists. Damages, including replacement cost of the trees, were estimated at more than \$50 000 (The Atlanta Journal Constitution, 1998, January 30).

The construction of advertising structures may also impact negatively on sensitive environments such as wetlands. The *Atlanta Journal Constitution* of August 29, 1998 reported about the construction of a number of storage sheds in Franklin County in Northeast Georgia, which provided a loophole for erecting billboards. One of these sheds was built in a swampy bulldozed area near a creek.



**Figure 3.31**  
**Ecological impact**



Although the direct ecological impact of outdoor information transfer seems insignificant compared to its economic, visual or other social impacts, its ecological impact cannot be ignored. In the United States of America trees along the roadside are often poisoned (top left), trimmed (top right) or cut down (bottom) in order to make billboards more visible to passing motorists.

In the United States public opposition to tree-cutting along roads mostly takes place on the grounds of beautification and visual impact. However, since vegetation constitutes an important part of the biological environment, the destruction of vegetation can also be interpreted in terms of ecological impact. Aspects to be taken into consideration in this regard include habitat destruction, loss of biodiversity, soil erosion and chemical pollution due to poisoning of vegetation.

In the urban environments of South Africa street trees are often damaged by the use of heavy-duty roofing nails for nailing illegal posters to such trees (Pretoria News, 1997, April 16). Philip Lloyd, columnist in the *Engineering News* (1996, July 26), must have had this problem in mind when he wrote: *Bother the tropical forests – our trees are dying from an overdose of iron, or strangulation by rope.*

### 3.3.8 SOUND POLLUTION

Modern sound technology has brought about an increase in sound pollution through outdoor information transfer. The voice of the public crier who through the ages has made an important contribution to local character and placeness is now literally being drowned by rock music resounding from enormous loudspeakers in front of the clothing or furniture store trying to draw the passer-by's attention to a promotion or sale. It seems as if developing communities show a special predilection for this type of advertising

A billboard on De Waal Drive, Cape Town, with the message *Hoot if you want to be a millionaire*, evoked such a response from passing motorists (would-be millionaires) that the advertiser had to change the message after local residents complained about the noise (Pretoria News, 1998, January 17).

### 3.3.9 LIGHT POLLUTION

Light pollution or sky glow is becoming a recognised form of pollution in developed countries such as the USA. It has an impact at the following levels:

- First of all it has an **aesthetic** implication, especially in larger urban areas but also along freeways and other important roads which *are being whitewashed by floodlit roadside businesses whose commercial glow obscures the heavenly lights for miles around* (Cray, 2000, p. 56). In the words of David L. Crawford (1996, online):

*Most Americans are growing up unable to see the stars their grandparents knew so well. They see the night sky only in pictures or at planetariums. This is true not only in cities, but also in many suburbs where street lamps and other sources of “light pollution” have obscured our view of constellations, meteor showers, and planets... Light pollution is not a matter of life and death. Yet it is important nonetheless, profoundly so. We human beings lose something of ourselves when we can no longer look up and see our place in the universe. It is like never again hearing the laughter of children; we give up a part of what we are.*

Aesthetic impact is not only about the loss of the stars: *Uncontrolled lighting often creates a garish landscape, with a confusing tangle of lights that shine into citizen's eyes rather than onto the ground, where it is needed* (Gilkison, 1998, online).

- At a scientific level light pollution has an impact on **astronomical observations**.
- **Psychological and physiological health and quality of life:** In city centres such as Manhattan, where the lights from illuminated billboards shine directly into the windows of residents, light pollution originating from outdoor advertising becomes a serious problem (Stay Free, online, (2)). It not only impairs the quality of life, but also creates a health problem since it interferes with the human body's biological rhythms by turning night into day (Graham, 1996, online). This problem becomes an even bigger reality where neon lights are used. In Mumbai, India, the Mumbai High Court ordered the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation to switch off all neon signs after 11 pm due to the effect of such lights on the lives of local residents (Indian Express, online). In referring to this case *Chennai Online* quotes a study undertaken by the International Institute of Sustainable Future which found that the continued direct contact with flashing neon rays leads to sleepiness, fatigue, headaches and frequent mood changes. According to *Chennai Online* a Mumbai neurologist has stated that neon lights may even trigger off epilepsy and migraine in some persons.



- **Ecological Impact:** It can be assumed that high-intensity, unshielded outdoor lights will have an adverse effect on many species of wildlife. The following serve as a good example in this regard. After being born, certain species of sea turtles rely on moonlight and starlight to direct them towards the safety of the ocean. Powerful lights from the shore disorientate these turtles with catastrophically consequences (Graham, 1996, online) (cf. Govender, 2001). Outdoor advertising technologies such as laser images and effects, used over longer periods of time in natural environments, may have a detrimental effect on the ecology. *Laser Force* (online), an outdoor advertising company, advertises its *Laser Billboards* as follow: *Make your message seen for miles. Dazzle audiences with laser graphics and beam projections. Put your logo anywhere ... even mountains!* (Emphasis added.)
  
- **Economical impact – Waste energy:** Wasted light from inefficient lighting sources in the USA equates to an annual waste of 12 million tons of coal or 35 million barrels of oil costing \$2 billion per year (Graham, 1996, online). The impact of this energy waste in terms of added acid rain and air pollution needs no mentioning.
  
- **Road safety impact:** Uncontrolled and unshielded lighting creates glare, diminishes visibility and contributes to accidents at night by blinding or confusing drivers and pedestrians.
  
- **Ratcheting:** This term refers to a snowball effect in the increase of outdoor light levels. When a specific enterprise illuminates its property at extremely high levels, surrounding areas that used to look adequately lit now appear too dark by comparison. This can be ascribed to the tendency of the human eye to adapt to the brightest object in its visual field. The iris in the eye stops down, letting less light in, as a result of this over-illumination and glare. The light levels of surrounding properties are now ratcheted up in order to compensate for the high light levels on the first property (cf. Gilkison, 1998, online; IDA, 1998, online).

Outdoor advertising provides the stimulus for ratcheting in the form of the competition factor. Certain enterprises, such as convenience stores and filling stations, are nowadays attempting to attract customers by making their canopy area the most brightly lit object in the neighbourhood. In this

manner illumination is used as the main instrument for advertising. This leads to a ratcheting war where enterprises in a neighbourhood are trying to outdo one another in attracting attention by illuminating their premises (cf. Gilkison, 1998, online; IDA, 1998, online). This problem is also evident among enterprises situated along freeways. From the above it is clear that outdoor advertising keeps the snowballing process regarding outdoor light levels alive.

In order to attract attention most billboards are ridiculously overlit. In certain cases externally illuminated billboards may be seen as an important contributor to ratcheting. The practice followed by many contractors of illuminating billboards from the bottom leads to excessive light spill into the sky, making an even larger contribution to sky glow. This problem is aggravated even further by the unnecessary practice of keeping billboards and signs illuminated throughout the night, even after the businesses advertised have closed (cf. IDA, 1997, online)

### 3.3.10 DEVALUATION OF PROPERTY VALUES AND URBAN DECAY

According to *Scenic America* (online, (1)), *billboards are both a symptom and a cause of urban blight.*

The proliferation of outdoor advertisements and signs also have an indirect effect in that it contributes to desensitising the human senses, which may tolerate and even contribute to urban decay:

*In an age in which advertisers propose rocketing billboards into orbit to illuminate the night sky, it is no coincidence that litter and graffiti are on the rise. The proliferation of litter and graffiti increases exponentially in a society willing to tolerate, if not encourage, advertisers' intent on commercializing all public space, including outer space* (Miller, online).

The following verdict indicates a relation between outdoor signs and property value:

*As is true of billboards, the esthetic (sic) interests that are implicated by temporary signs (political campaign signs on public property) are presumptively at work in all parts of the city, including those where the appellees posted their signs, and there is no basis in the record in this case upon which to rebut that presumption. These interests (aesthetic interests) are both psychological and economic. The character of*



Date of photo: 1997



Citizens for a Scenic Florida [<http://www.scenicflorida.org>]



### Figure 3.32 Devaluation of property values

In the absence of effective management practices outdoor information transfer may devalue property values in residential areas, as shown by the photographs above. The top photograph was taken in an upmarket suburb of Pretoria.



*the environment affects the quality of life and the value of property in both residential and commercial areas* (Justice Stevens in *Members of the City Council v. Taxpayers for Vincent*, 466 U.S. 789, 817 (1984) cited in *Citizens for a Scenic Florida*, online, (1)).

In higher density central city districts (downtown areas) such as Manhattan, New York, one may find the strange phenomenon where outdoor advertising may actually enhance the value of certain buildings while at the same time contributing to urban decay. According to *Stay Free Magazine* (*Stay Free!*, online (2)), some property owners in Manhattan earn so much from outdoor advertising covering their buildings that they do not bother to rent out interior space to businesses or residents. Buildings are sometimes bought strictly for their advertising potential. In 1997 the Times Tower, although considered unrentable above the first floor, sold for \$110 million. The four major signs on its north side alone bring in \$7 million annually. Considerable advertising income is also generated from the other three sides and the rent paid for the ground and first floors. Such *derelict* buildings, serving almost solely as giant outdoor advertising structures, will definitely contribute to a *ghost town atmosphere* and a lack of vitality in such areas due to the small numbers of occupants and visitors, which in the end will result in urban decay.