

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

South Africa has witnessed tremendous changes in the years since the 1994 democratic elections. The changes in the so-called 'New South Africa' have included changes in political policies which ultimately resulted in changes as to how national identity is seen or expressed. The creation of a new South African reality and the attempts to establish a new national identity required new linguistic and visual vocabularies to construct the idea of a country significantly different to the former apartheid era. New discourse, language and visual language are necessary components in the construction of new realities and new "truths" (Gqola 2001:96). The public rehearsal and repetition of such new vocabularies (linguistic and visual) in the media ensures that the new discourses "capture the nation's imagination and are gradually accepted as 'truth'" (Gqola 2001:96).

The visual brand identities of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) television channels are examples of such a new discourse and new visual language. Television for a democratic South Africa meant that existing national television channels had to be restructured and reorganised, and as a result thereof SABC channels were re-launched in 1996. The existing CCV-TV channel (Contemporary Community Values) was re-launched as SABC1, TV1 as SABC2, and the NNTV channel (National Network Television) as SABC3. SABC1 and SABC2 are free-to-air public broadcast channels; in other words, viewers make no direct payment towards programming and the channels are "funded by government or by private supporters, rather than solely by advertising" (Bignell 2004:308, 313).

The programming on these two public service channels typically combines "programmes that inform, educate and entertain in ways that encourage the betterment of audiences and society in general" (Bignell 2004:312-313). SABC3, on the other hand, is a free-to-air commercial service television channel that is "funded by the sale of advertising time or sponsorship of programmes" (Bignell 2004:305). Each post-apartheid television channel soon established and broadcast its own identity and

promotional visual imagery, thus creating new visual vocabularies and constructing new 'truths'.

1.2 Background and aims of the study

In their infancy the slogans of post-apartheid television channels declared *Simunye*, *We Are One* and then *Simunye – One Time* for SABC1; *Made in Africa* and then *Come Alive with Us* for SABC2; while SABC3 proclaimed *Quality Shows* and *We're Simply The Best* (Gqola 2001:101, 105). The restructuring of South African national television and the resulting channels echo the sentiment of Monroe Edwin Price (1995:16-17) that “[g]overnment restructuring of broadcasting reflects many other aspects of government policy: attitudes towards minority cultures, towards religion ... and towards ideas of citizenship and participation”.

The SABC television channels and their earlier brand identities (between 1996 and 2002, before corporatisation) showed images of a variety of optimistic South Africans, perhaps rendered in a kind of idealism regarding a country unified in its diversity. In a new South African democracy concerned with unity, such aspects of solidarity in government policy and attitudes are unlikely to be established in an instant, and rather form part of a continuous refinement of such attitudes and ideas.

Kristin Orgeret (2004:156) argues that the restructuring of South African television follows imperatives contradictory to the national narrative of unity. In an article entitled *Unifying and dividing processes in the national media: the Janus face of South Africa* (2004), she argues that the restructuring of the three SABC national television channels into “distinctive social groups follow[s] a logic that may be working against the idea of a unified nation” (Orgeret 2004:156). She notes that SABC1 broadcasts in Nguni and English, addressing mainly the young, black audiences, while SABC2 reflects a family focus and broadcasts in Afrikaans, Sotho and English. Additionally, “SABC3 wants to be ‘much better’, ‘spirited’ and ‘cosmopolitan’ in its reach for the more up-market English-speaking audiences” (Orgeret 2004:156).

The restructuring of the SABC channels and their new brand identities thus seem to continue the old vocabularies and truths of apartheid logic by dividing the audience into groups based on race, language and class. Orgeret (2004:156) thus believes that the

three SABC channels are structured according to segregated and racially structured markets that “work against the idea of a unified nation”, and instead, support a dividing process that hinders cultural transformation. She indicates a need for “qualitative content studies of how the stories which the national broadcaster narrates to the nation deals with questions of inclusion and exclusion” and nation building (Orgeret 2004:149, 157).

This study therefore engages in critical analyses of the SABC1, SABC2 and SABC3 television channels. The study explores how these three channels have been organised, structured, and redefined over the years, and the consequences of such structuring on the creation and definition of certain audience groups or target markets. The main purpose is to explore the manifestation and dissemination of dominant political ideologies and myths by the SABC television channels and their respective brand identities. The assumption is made that such ideologies can influence the construction of South African identities. Desiree Lewis (2000:157) confirms this assumption by stating that South African television “forms a dense and compelling arena for viewers to define and explore their subjectivities and [the] transforming political environment – not merely through the subject matter of [... television content], but through a dynamic interaction with their forms and codes”.

This study argues that the visual identities of SABC television channels and their respective forms and codes illustrate the important role of the media as a source of cultural pedagogy in the process of identity construction. Identity construction and its relation to cultural politics is one of the most central concerns within contemporary discourse of South African Cultural Studies (Wasserman & Jacobs 2003; Nuttall & Michael 2000). Sean Jacobs (2003:29) argues that debates about mass media in South Africa are at the same time debates about identity construction, cultural transformation and social change. Undoubtedly the media play a pivotal role in such processes. In this regard, the following statement of Douglas Kellner (2001:1) is particularly relevant to the role of the media in South African culture:

[P]roducts of media culture provide materials out of which we forge our very identities; our sense of selfhood; our notion of what it means to be male or female; our sense of class, of ethnicity and race, of nationality, of sexuality; and of ‘us’ and ‘them’. ... Media stories provide the symbols, myths, and resources through which we constitute a common culture and through the appropriation of which

we insert ourselves into this culture. ... The media contribute to educating us how to behave and what to think, feel, believe, fear, and desire – and what not to.

It is therefore important to study the products of media culture when addressing issues of cultural transformation and identity construction.

In South Africa, television plays an important part in media culture since the total adult television viewing population consists of 19.6 million people¹ (*Encyclopaedia of brands ...* 2004:288; SABC TV channels 2009). Given that television is quite an accessible medium in a South African nation-state, it is important to study it as a main source and medium for the transmission of ideology (Tomaselli, Tomaselli & Muller 1989:1). The prominent television studies theorist, Jonathan Bignell (2004:62), states that television institutions (for example, the SABC) “both embody and transmit ideological ‘messages’ which are the result of their ownership, their relationship to national broadcasting regulations and their adoption of particular cultural values”. The SABC television channels, as part of the SABC institution, can therefore be described as media that transmit ideological messages.

In South Africa, such consequences of ideological representations have been central to concepts of resistance, opposition and politics (Nuttall & Michael 2000). Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Ann Michael (2000:20) quote Okwui Enwezor, who explains that cultural transformation, and “the ability of the post-apartheid nation to imagine a new identity has to do with ... ideological battle”. The question of who is included and who is excluded often forms the nucleus of intellectual debates regarding ideology. Nuttall and Michael (2000:13) state that it is “largely under the rubric of ‘inclusiveness’, [...and] an agenda to include that which has been marginalized” that cultural studies emerged in South Africa. Sixteen years have passed since the inauguration of a democratic South Africa, and it is interesting to explore the manner in which South Africans are grouped, organised and addressed by the national broadcaster. It is also interesting to see which ideological messages are aimed at which audiences, and to explore some of the myths that support and perpetuate the ideological messages disseminated by the SABC television channels.

¹ The South African Advertising Research Foundation (SAARF) AMPS 2004 results revealed that 71,2 percent of the population have access to television (www.saarf.co.za).

The purpose of this study is to engage critically with the visual landscape and to explore some of the ideologies and myths in South African television by focusing on SABC television channel branding. The dissertation puts forward the argument that these channels and their brand identities broadcast a new visual language aligned with the ideologies held by a post-apartheid nation. Price (1995:3) states “[t]he millions of images that float through the public mind help determine the very nature of national allegiances, attitudes towards place, family, government, and state”, and it seems logical that the government, and a parastatal organisation such as the SABC, would aim to control those images; at least to some extent.

The visual brand identities of SABC1, SABC2 and SABC3 appearing between 2000 and 2009 are investigated in this study. Major changes to the channel brand identities occur twice during this time. The first changes coincided with the corporatisation of the SABC during 2002 and 2003, and the second major changes occurred in 2007 and again in 2009. The visual examples of the SABC1, SABC2 and SABC3 brand identities are therefore explored critically in order to determine some of the meanings attached to the brand identities, and to identify key ideologies and myths possibly propagated in this manner by the national broadcaster.

It must also be noted that the visual brand identity of SABC Africa can be explored in the same manner. Due to the restriction of space, a decision was made to omit the full discussion of the visual brand identity of SABC Africa. The choice to exclude this channel is additionally based on the dissolution of the SABC Africa channel in August 2008 (Mochiko 2008). SABC Africa is also a pay television channel, available to satellite television subscribers only. Given its short existence (2003-2008) and its inaccessibility to the majority of South African viewers, it has been excluded from Chapter Four of the study. An exploration of the visual brand identity of SABC Africa is valuable, however, since it may contribute to a clearer idea of the total array of ideologies and myths transmitted by the national broadcaster. In an effort to preserve some of the aspects, a few examples of the SABC Africa brand identity are used in Chapter Two and Three to illustrate theoretical points. In these two chapters the possible signs, codes, meanings, myth and ideology of the SABC Africa are used as examples in an attempt to preserve interpretations of SABC1, SABC2 and SABC3 and their brand identities for the interpretation in Chapter Four.

1.3 Theoretical framework and literature review

This study is situated within a visual culture and cultural studies theoretical paradigm. The visuality of the SABC television channel brand identities is central to this dissertation. Television channel brand identities include two major visual aspects, the first of which is television. Television also includes audio aspects, but in this regard Nicholas Mirzoeff (1999:10) states that television is predominantly visual rather than textual, because “[w]e watch television, not listen to it”. It is the rapid succession and proliferation of visual images that characterise television. Mirzoeff (1999:1) notes the importance of television in society when he states that “[m]odern life takes place onscreen. ... Human experience is now more visual and visualized than ever before ... For most people ..., life is mediated through television”.

The second visual component is visual brand identity. Observing the media landscape and television in particular, it is evident that brands and branding have become important features of contemporary popular culture. Brands are everywhere. They appear on the streets, in shopping malls, on buildings, in magazines, on the internet and television. A visual brand identity is a combination of names, logos, symbols graphics, colours and designs that create a brand’s visual code. It is not the *only* aspect of a corporate brand identity, but it is an important aspect of corporate branding because it communicates an organisation’s values in a concise manner. Visual brand identity is palpable, visible and designed (Olins 1989:7). But brand identities are visual entities beyond their designed elements and often function as “metapictures” (Mitchell 1995). In other words brand identities function as powerful metaphors that allow complex theories to be communicated at a glance. Thus a large part of the brand image held by viewers or consumers is not a ‘real’ picture, and their visuality is only metaphoric (Mitchell 1995). This is an example of “the growing tendency to visualise things that are not in themselves visual” as a key characteristic of the new visual culture (Mirzoeff 1999:5).

The two visual aspects, namely television and brand identity, come together in this study to form the primary area of investigation for this dissertation. These visual aspects firmly place the study in Visual Culture and Visual Studies. Mitchell (2002:87) maintains that it is useful to “distinguish between ‘visual studies’ and ‘visual culture’ as, respectively, the field of study and the object or target of study. Visual Studies is the

study of visual culture”. Visual Studies is the process of understanding, interpreting and explaining visual images in people’s lives (Barnard 2001:5) such as television channel brand identities. The study of visual culture often aims to “overcome the veil of familiarity and self-evidence that surrounds the experience of seeing, and [... turns] it into a problem for analysis, a mystery to be unravelled” (Mitchell 2002:86).

The study is also situated within a cultural studies theoretical paradigm. John Walker and Sarah Chaplin (1997:47) state that the field of Cultural Studies includes a larger variety of cultures that are not only restricted to the visual sense and include, for example, literature and music. They also note that academics of Cultural Studies “often come from a sociological rather than an arts/humanities background” (Walker & Chaplin 1997:47). Ideology is situated as a central concept in cultural studies (Storey 1996:3) and forms the major theoretical framework of this study. In this regard it bears similarities to Media Studies and its concern with the theoretical concepts of ideology and hegemony and its relationship to issues regarding media ownership and institutions. Media Studies explores a field beyond the aesthetic and design aspects of the media (Walker & Chaplin 1997:44). The study is thus interdisciplinary and includes, for example, theory of ideology, Cultural Studies, South African television, Media Studies, semiotics, branding, corporate identity and design.

Television channel brand identities are situated in the environment of mass media and broadcasting. Tomaselli *et al* (1989:2) note that “there is a degree of uncertainty about how the various components of broadcasting can be analysed for their ideological characteristics”. Therefore they suggest an analysis of four components or four levels of ideology: the level of programmes; the level of channels; broadcasting institutions; and the level of legislation in broadcasting (Tomaselli *et al* 1989:2-4). Although this study explores the levels of ideology in programmes, broadcast institutions and legislation, it is mainly concerned with the second component above, namely the level of ideology in *channels*. Tomaselli *et al* (1989:3) maintain that programmes are segregated into different channels whose signals reach “a particular and intended local, regional, national or international geographic area”. On these channels, the programmes’ “style and content are different to those on other frequencies” (Tomaselli *et al* 1989:3). At this level, ideology seems even less imposed, since the audience has a choice between channels, and therefore a choice between the ideologies that the different channels reflect (Tomaselli *et al* 1989:3).

Bignell (2004:2) has a similar argument to Tomaselli *et al* (1989) in terms of the objects of study in television. He explains that approaches to Television Studies “are not a set of tools, but more like a group of different languages [which] do not translate neatly one into another, and each defines its world in rather different ways”. Bignell (2004:2) also states that courses of study tend to focus on one of the following areas of television: programmes as texts, institution and its production practices, sociological study of audiences, and television history and developments in broadcast policy.

This study uses a “multi-perspectival approach” as described by Bignell (2004:2) and Kellner (2001). Kellner (2001:4-5) describes this approach as a “three-fold project ... that a) discusses production and political economy, b) engages in textual analysis, and c) studies the reception and use of cultural texts”. Kellner (2001:5) maintains that such an approach provides comprehensive critical and political perspectives “that enable individuals to dissect the meanings, messages, and effects of dominant cultural forms” and opens up a theoretical space for engaging in a “struggle for a better society and a better life”.

For the first part of the three-fold project that Kellner (2001:4) suggests, this study explores the production and political economy that provides a context for understanding the SABC branded channels. Kellner (2001:16) clarifies that *political economy* “calls attention to the fact that the production and distribution of culture takes place within a specific economic system, constituted by relations between the state and the economy”. In this way, the study explores issues regarding the relations between the SABC and the South African economic system, and the relation between the SABC and the state. These relations can assist in “determining the limits and range of political and ideological discourses and effects” (Kellner 2001:5) and could indicate the formulas and conventions of production (e.g. public versus commercial broadcasting) within such a system. A literature study of recent annual reports, SABC documents and government documents is useful to determine the production and political economy that relates to the SABC.

The second part – textual analyses – can be qualitative or quantitative and can assist in a better understanding of “various forms of discourses, ideological positions, narrative strategies, image construction, and effects” (Kellner 2001:6). In this study, such textual analysis are qualitative rather than quantitative in order to apply “various

critical theories to unpack the meanings of the texts [... and to examine] how texts function to produce meaning” (Kellner 2001:6). Kellner (2001:6-7) states that in cultural studies, textual analysis “combines formalist [formalist in the sense of branding and semiotics] analysis with critique of how cultural meanings convey specific ideologies of ... race, class, ... nation and other ideological dimensions”. For this study, a semiotic analysis of the SABC channels, specifically their visual brand identities, is used to discover the specific ideologies that they reflect.

Audience reception studies, as the third part of the project described by Kellner (2001:4, 9), “illuminate why diverse audiences interpret texts in various, sometimes conflicting, ways”. This study does not, however, engage in interviews to determine how television audiences interpret texts, but rather explores audience reception theories, based on literature reviews, and then speculates to determine possible polysemic readings of the SABC brands. The theoretical work of David Morley (1980; 1992) and Stuart Hall (2001) are helpful in this regard. This is done to indicate the important role of the media and of branding in the construction of identities, and to explore possible affects that specific SABC brands can have on identity construction in South Africa.

The textual analyses of the SABC television channel brand identities comprise an exploration of the respective forms and codes of the SABC channel brands as they manifest on screen. The reason for this selection of visual examples of SABC channel identities is that the screen forms the main point of contact between a channel and its viewers. In other words, the screen is the platform where channel identities are most visible – through their channel ‘idents’² and their own television advertisements.

In addition to analyses of visual channel identification and advertisements, the author also explores the websites of the three channels, since they offer a densely coded and encapsulating account of the respective channel brand identities reflected by both their on-air channel identification and advertisements. Together, these visual examples of each SABC channel can provide insight into some of the political ideologies apparent in South African television. The underlying ideologies of the SABC channels seem to indicate that SABC television is structured according to disparate markets and

² Bignell (2004:308) defines channel idents as “the symbols representing production companies, television channels, etc., often comprising graphics or animation”.

identities where segregation of race, language and class still play a large role in the structures of the television channels and the messages they relay.

1.4 Methodology

The first half of the dissertation consists of a literature study (Chapters 2-3) while the second half (Chapter 4) incorporates the author's visual analysis of the SABC television channel brands and the exploration of political ideologies that may be embedded in the channel branding.

As a part of the literature study, the dissertation explores television as a communications channel that transmits certain ideologies and myths. Theories of ideology are investigated in conjunction with a historical perspective of South African television and the evolution of the SABC television channels. The literature study in the first part also explores brands as mythical carriers of meaning, and the two theoretical fields of semiotics and branding are explored in combination to gain clarity regarding the signs, codes and meanings of television channel brands.

The second part of the dissertation (Chapter 4) consists of the application of these theoretical principles in an analysis of visual applications of the SABC brand identities. Visual examples have been gathered through Digital Video Disk (DVD) recordings of the SABC television channel brand identities. The earlier brand identities (before 2007) were recorded on DVD for a full day per channel per year. The brand elements of each channel were extracted by taking still photographs of the on-screen³ idents and advertisements. Technological advances made it possible to record the later brand identities on Personal Video Recorder (PVR) to transfer the brand elements, idents and advertisements to a DVD recorder, and capture still images by playing the DVD on computer and utilising the snap tool to capture still frames. The still frames of the SABC1, 2 and 3 brand identities were sorted into groups and types of on-air brand elements, and the illustrations in the dissertation were made by combining these still frames in a storyboard manner. The author believes that the multiple still images portrayed in a combined, storyboard manner offer a better impression of the overall brand identity than singular still frames when presented in a text or print document.

³ In the captions of the images or Figures, the still photographs or snaps from the channel websites (and computer screen) are referred to as web grabs, while the still frames of the branding on the television channels (television screen) are referred to as screen grabs.

The images of the brand identities of the SABC television channels were thus recorded as motion pictures⁴ and then photographed as still images by the author, unless otherwise indicated beneath each image in the dissertation. In some cases the quality of images was better on the online portfolios of the design companies and advertising agencies and these have been included. Variations in brand identities also occurred sporadically, but they have not necessarily been captured on the designated recording days. Similarly, some advertisements were not aired during the recording of the on-air brand elements. In these cases, the images have been supplemented with images obtained from the brand managers and on-air managers⁵ of the television channels, and also from images posted on the internet by the design companies.

It must be noted that the discussion of the SABC1 brand identity is the longest, since the channel had the most variations and changes to its visual brand identity, while changes on SABC2 and SABC3 were less dramatic and occurred less often. Another reason for its longer length is that SABC1's *Ya Mampela* brand identity is more controversial in nature, and thus received more academic attention and more criticism and discussion, especially regarding the *PF Jones* advertisement for SABC1. The SABC1 channel is also discussed first and unpacks and employs many of the definitions and terms of television branding that are used throughout the study.

1.5 Overview of chapters

The first chapter has placed the dissertation within the context of visual cultural studies. It also provided the background of this study and highlighted the aims, theoretical framework and methodology.

The second chapter explores the concepts, characteristics and modes of operation of ideology. The manner in which ideology operates is examined by looking at the historical and theoretical development of the concept of ideology. Key terms in ideology theory; for example, base and superstructure, false consciousness, hegemony and

⁴ The author may be contacted regarding a compilation of such video clip recordings.

⁵ It was difficult, if not impossible to organise appointments with the brand managers of the SABC television channels to discuss the brand identities. Repeated endeavours to arrange meetings were turned down due to a lack of time on the part of the brand managers and channel managers. Special thanks to Ndomiso Ngobese (brand manager SABC1 2004) and Simone Berger (on-air manager SABC1 2007) who provided tapes with visual material and other documents pertaining to the brand identities of SABC1.

myth, are explored, and the changing notions of ideology are then discussed alongside relevant moments in South African television history. By examining these concepts of ideology, the modes of operation of ideology and myth within the SABC as an institution become clearer.

The third chapter examines the theoretical underpinnings of semiotics and branding. This chapter argues that the communicative process of branding and corporate identity is a deliberate process of semiosis. This chapter, however, is more concerned with the semiotic process or semiotic structure of branding and corporate identity, and does not aim to be a study of semiotics. Instead, the chapter utilises semiotic theory as a means to explore identity constructions within the SABC channel brand identities.

The chapter briefly engages with the origin and evolution of branding practices, and also discusses key concepts of branding and corporate identity that assist in a better understanding of the SABC television channel brands. The chapter also investigates the on-air elements specific to television channel branding. The signs, codes and meanings of brands and corporate identity are explored in terms of their places in the process of semiosis. The chapter also argues that the process of semiosis, the process of branding, and the societal structure of a dominant political ideology, are similar in their structures.

The fourth chapter applies the findings of Chapters Two and Three to the visual examples of the SABC channel brand identities to examine the possible underlying myths and ideologies of each channel. Various examples of the visual brand identity of each channel are looked at critically and then linked to dominant political ideologies and myths. This chapter explores the relations between these individual sets of political ideologies of the television channels and the prevalent political ideologies of contemporary South African society during the period 2000 to 2009. The study argues that the structuring of the SABC television channels, each with their own ideologies, indicates how disparate ideologies co-exist in South Africa. It is also argued that such ideologies can influence the process of identity construction.

The fifth and last chapter of this dissertation provides a summarised view of the findings in the previous chapters. This chapter also includes the conclusions made from this study and indicates some of the possible implications. It highlights the

contribution of this type of study, and also indicates its limitations. Lastly, this chapter suggests further areas of inquiry that could contribute to further research within the context of this dissertation.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter introduced the research topic and contextualised the study of television channel brand identities within the context of Visual Studies. It also indicated the main goals and objectives of the study, and indicated the method in which the research has been dealt with. The chapter briefly introduced the SABC television channels, and the manner in which the channels have been structured according to audience segmentation based on race, language and culture.

The chapter also indicated that this kind of division has been at the centre of debate in South African Cultural Studies, and that post-apartheid discourse attempts to address such divisions in order to include that which has previously been marginalised. Consequently new language and realities are created that attempt to illustrate what a new, improved and inclusive South Africa should look like. The visual brand identities of the SABC television channels are examples of cultural productions that aim to promote visions of a 'new South Africa'. Each SABC channel appears to interpret and endorse distinct views regarding the definition of such a 'new South Africa', and presents this through appropriate brand identities that appear to be ideologically inspired.

Of central importance to this study is the manner in which the national broadcaster and its respective television channels represent or promote certain ideological messages. The study argues that the SABC television brand identities are carefully designed to reinforce the ideologies that these channels foster. The ideologies and myths are encoded within the channel idents, advertisements and websites by means of visual and textual signs and codes. In order to gain a better understanding of these ideologies within the SABC brand representations, it is first necessary to examine the ideological processes within South African television in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

IDEOLOGY AND SOUTH AFRICAN TELEVISION

2.1 Introduction

Mass media has become an important field for ideological analyses of cultural texts. Media culture is one of “the most visible and important social and cultural institutions” (Sonderling 2001:323). For Douglas Kellner (1995:1), media culture provides topical hieroglyphics of contemporary social life because it “articulates the dominant values, political ideologies, and social developments and novelties of the era” (Kellner 2001:[sp]). Media culture and its intersection with social and political struggles contribute greatly in the modelling of everyday life (Kellner 1995:2). Understanding the products of mass media therefore helps to understand contemporary society (Kellner 1995:5).

For Chris Barker (2003:70-71), culture “is political because it is expressive of relations of power”, and therefore, ideological. The concept of ideology is thus essential to any discussion of culture (Lemon 1996:209). If mass media, including South African television, forms a predominant platform “for the communication of ideology in society and manipulating people” (Sonderling 2001:311), then it is important to gain a better understanding of ideology and South African television as a medium that carries such ideology.

This chapter therefore investigates concepts and theories of ideology and also examines how ideology operates in the media and society at large. The purpose here is to contribute towards an understanding of ideology, its mode of operation and its relationship with television in South Africa. This chapter points out that the SABC, as a television institution, both embodies and transmits ideologies related to its ownership and its relationship with national broadcasting cultures (Bignell 2004:6). In this sense, it argues that the SABC produces discourses and ideologies “through the manipulation of language (texts, television texts, cultural artefacts) and the mass media in order to serve ... [its] own interests” (Sonderling 2001:311).

Defining the term ideology¹ proves to be problematic, since various definitions of the term seem to co-exist within literature. The multiplicity of its uses are exemplified with a description by Slavoj Žižek (1994a:3-4), who states that the term ideology

can designate anything from a contemplative attitude that mis-recognises its dependence on social reality to an action oriented set of beliefs, from the indispensable medium in which individuals live out their relations to a social structure to false ideas which legitimate a dominant political power.

In its simplest sense, “ideology is concerned with the study of ideas and how people and societies think” (Sonderling 2001:311). Similarly, Jennifer Lemon (1996:209) notes that the popular definition of the term ideology “refers to the ideas, attitudes, values, belief systems or interpretive and conceptual frameworks held by members of a particular social group”. Bignell (2004:308) expands on these definitions of ideology by adding that these values, belief systems or assumptions arise from the economic and class divisions in a culture, which underlie the ways of life accepted as normal in that culture.

In Bignell’s definition, the subject of the relations of power within society comes to the fore. Similarly, Barker (2003:71) maintains that “the concept of ideology refers to maps of meaning which, while they purport to be universal truths, are historically specific understandings that obscure and maintain power”. Within literature on ideology, it is generally believed that these assumptions, belief systems and maps of meaning are selective and promote specific (and perhaps partial) views of reality (Lemon 1996:209).

Above and beyond the existences of multiple definitions of the term, it is perhaps more important to note the dual use of this term. John B Thompson (1984:3-4) observes that the term ideology appears in the writings of many authors, and that “its occurrence in the literature today would show that the term is used in two fundamentally differing ways”. In the first instance, the term is used as a “purely descriptive term: one speaks

¹ Simon Blackburn (1996:185) defines “ideology” as “[a]ny wide-ranging system of beliefs, ways of thought, and categories that provide the foundation of programmes of political and social action: an ideology is a conceptual scheme with a practical application. Derogatorily, another person’s ideology may be thought of as spectacles that distort and disguise the real *status quo*. ... Promises that political philosophy and morality can be freed from ideology are apt to be vain, since allegedly cleansed and pure programmes depend, for instance, upon particular views of human nature, what counts as human flourishing, and the conditions under which it is found”.

of ‘systems of thought’, of ‘systems of belief’, of ‘symbolic practices’ which pertain to social action or political projects” (Thompson 1984:4). Thompson (1984:4) describes this use of the term as a *neutral conception* of ideology. From this neutral perspective, “ideology is present in every political programme, irrespective of whether the programme is directed towards the preservation or transformation of the social order” (Thompson 1984:4). In other words, this concept of ideology claims that all groups in society have their own ideology, and that all ideologies are equal. But this neutral concept of ideology is not very useful for the purpose of this study.

Following the approach of visual culture studies, this dissertation rather employs a critical theory of ideology. Thompson (1984:4) states that a *critical conception² of ideology* is “essentially linked to the process of sustaining asymmetrical relations of power – that is, to the process of maintaining domination”. Cultural artefacts such as written or visual texts create and convey certain meanings and ideas, which for Thompson are culturally produced, and establish and maintain the power structures of society. For Thompson (1990:7) then, “[i]deology, broadly speaking, is *meaning in the service of power*”.

A critical theory therefore negotiates visual culture and its relation to ideology in a way expressed by Hall, where cultural practice is the “realm where one engages with and elaborates a politics” (Hall cited by Mirzoeff 1999:24). It is an engagement with the politics of cultural forms rather than party politics. In this way, cultural studies are a “more differentiated political, rather than aesthetic, valuation of cultural artefacts” (Kellner 2001). The concept of ideology and its relation to politics then “forces the readers to perceive that all cultural texts have distinct biases, interests, and embedded values, reproducing the point of view of their producers and often the values of the dominant social groups” (Kellner & Durham 2001:6). All cultural texts, including television and its channel brand identities, can therefore be regarded as political, since they are expressive of relations of power (Barker 2003:70).

However, in order to gain a clearer understanding of this critical concept of ideology, Lemon (1996:209) suggests that some of its main features can be understood by examining its theoretical and historical context. The following sections therefore employ

² Thompson (1984:4) maintains that a *critical conception of ideology* “preserves the negative connotation which has been conveyed by the term throughout most of its history and it binds the analysis of ideology to the question of critique”.

a historical perspective on ideology as a critical discursive practice³ within the context of cultural studies. The next section does not, however, provide an extensive history or explanation of the developments in ideology theory, but instead highlights the main concepts underlying ideology in order to provide a background that assists in a better understanding of the power relations within the context of South African television, and within the SABC television channels more specifically.

2.2 Classical Marxist theories of ideology and South African television in the 1970s

The word ideology was first used by the French philosopher Destutt de Tracy in 1796 to describe a new “science of ideas” which he believed to be an objective study to uncover the origins of ideas (Althusser 1994:120; Heywood 2003:6). De Tracy’s aim for such a science could be considered as being in line with a neutral conception of ideology in the sense that it would study the origins and “the way attitudes and beliefs are organised into a coherent pattern” (Sonderling 2001:313). But despite De Tracy’s high expectations of this new science, the original meaning of the term had little impact on the later use of the term (Heywood 2003:6).

Within its contemporary sense, ideology is employed by the social sciences and humanities in its critical sense with resulting political implications. In other words, ideology does not have the general origin of ideas as an object of study, but instead has political ideas as objects of study.

This concept of ideology enjoyed in modern and political thought has its origins in the writings of Karl Marx, who took up the term 50 years later and gave it a quite different meaning than that described by De Tracy (Althusser 1994:120). Marx does not offer a general definition of ideology, but in his early work, *The German Ideology* ([1846] 1970), co-written with Friedrich Engels he writes:

[t]he ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling class ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time the ruling *intellectual* force. The class which has the

³ The idea of ideology as discursive practice refers to an analysis of “the production of knowledge through language which gives meaning to material objects and social practices. Material objects and social practices are given meaning or ‘brought into view’ by language and are thus discursively formed” (Barker 2003:439).

means of *material* production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it (Marx & Engels 1970:64).⁴

From this description, the term ideology describes a study and critique of the ideas of the ruling class. For Marx, the ruling class ideas or ideologies are the reason why the ruling minority, the so-called bourgeoisie or elite, is able to hold power over the masses of people, and why the proletariat or masses accept their subordination. For Marx, ideology is created from the construction and communication of a dominant vision of society that justifies the rule of the elite over the subordinate masses (Sonderling 2001:314). When this construct or image is accepted by the masses as legitimate, the power of the ruling class becomes secure, and force becomes unnecessary. The ideas of the ruling class thus rule or dominate the masses and ideology becomes the science of the “ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man or social group” (Althusser 1994:120; Kellner & Durham 2001:6).

Classical Marxist theory⁵ interprets this social group or social order in terms of a base/superstructure metaphor or model (Figure 1). Marx (1961:67) explains:

In the social production which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material powers of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society - the real foundation, on which legal and political superstructures arise and to which definite forms of social consciousness correspond. The mode of production of material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary, their social being determines their consciousness.

According to this Marxist model, it is a society's base which determines its superstructure. The economic or material base, or infrastructure as it is known, is the sum of the means of production (material powers) and the relations of production. The

⁴ Heywood (2003:7) believes that this quote from *The German Ideology* contains Marx's clearest description of ideology.

⁵ Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) were “primarily concerned with economic, political and philosophical issues and worked out explanations of the capitalist theory and mode of production. They did not develop an ‘aesthetic’ of culture or literature, although ... Marxist principles and attitudes have been adapted to create a Marxist theory of literature: what it has been, and what it might and, perhaps, should be” (Cuddon 1998:492).

means of production is the combination of the apparatus or means of labour, and the resources or subject of labour. Within this model, the class that owns the means of production of material goods in a society, and profits from it, holds the power and constitutes the ruling or elite minority, or the dominant class of the society (Marx 1961:93; White 1992:164).

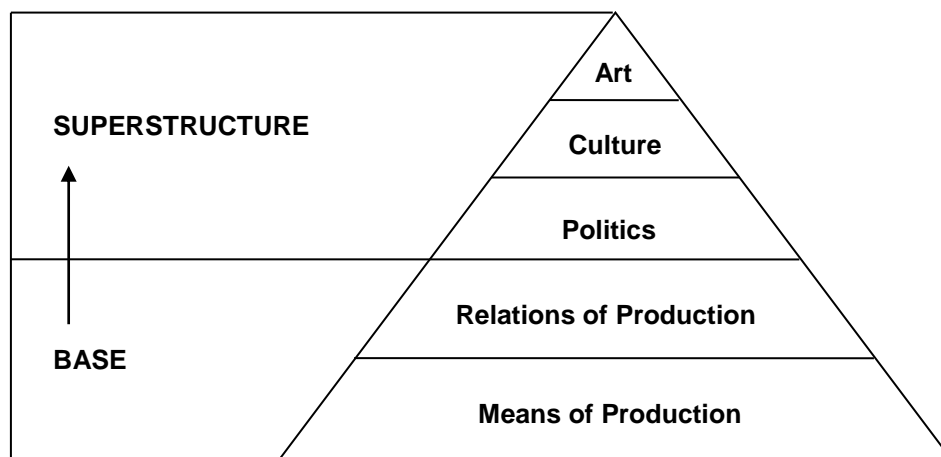


Figure 1: Base and superstructure in Marxist theory.
(Barker 2003:71).

For example, the base or infrastructure in a developing South African capitalist economy, from about 1870 to 1994, was controlled by white people, with large-scale capital (particularly mining but also sections of secondary industry) dominated by English speaking people, and agriculture dominated predominantly by a growing Afrikaans petit bourgeoisie (Wolpe 1995:67, 79-80). The dominance of the capitalist mode of production emerged first through British imperialism, followed by internal capitalist development (Wolpe 1995:66).

Harold Wolpe (1995:62) notes that the apartheid economic system developed “in a period in which ‘gold’ and ‘maize’ were the dominant productive sectors of the economy” during a time when massive “secondary industrialisation” was occurring. For Wolpe (1995:67-68), separate development (before 1984) and apartheid (from 1984) functioned as “the *mechanisms specific to South Africa* in the period of secondary industrialisation, of maintaining a high rate of capitalist exploitation through a system which guarantees a cheap and controlled [migrant] labour force” by facilitating the disintegration of the pre-capitalist African subsistence and redistributive economies. Wolpe (1995:62) thus defines apartheid as “the attempt of the capitalist class to meet the expanding demand for cheap African labour in the era of industrial manufacturing

capital” and secondly, as a mechanism of protection of white workers “against the resulting increased competition from Black workers”.

Although the economic system that followed the inauguration of the Nationalist Party to power in 1948 was a system based on private enterprise, it was controlled by the social interests of government (Legassick 1974:10, 25). In addition to private enterprises, large organisations like Iscor, Eskom, Spoornet, Telkom, South African Airways and the SABC were fully or partially owned and controlled by government. Both private and state-owned industries experienced restrictions on employment by the government. Profitable means of production was assured by creating legislation that sustained the exploitation of a migrant African labour force. The racial laws were made to appear neutral, thus masking the nature and consequences of capitalism (Wolpe 1995:66).

From the above it is apparent that the base or infrastructure of South Africa was owned and controlled by white people. For Marx and Engels (1970:64), the question of who owns the means of production is central to the ruling class ideas or ideology of that society. At this level of social organisation, “[f]undamental class identities, alliances, and material interests are established ... according to who owns, controls, and profits from the basic mode of production” (White 1992:164). Out of this organisation of the base, class differences are established, so that the bourgeoisie has control over the material production (the economic base), and also control over the mental production (superstructure). At this level, those who lack the means of material and mental production, namely the proletariat, are subject to it (Marx & Engels 1970:64).

The superstructure is therefore a direct result of ownership of means of production at the economic base. In other words, according to classical Marxist theory, the economic base in the hands of mostly white South Africans, with its capitalist mode of production and exploitation of a cheap and controlled labour force, facilitated the maintenance of apartheid laws and politics, and its support for military patriotism, racialism, patriarchy, Christianity, morality and “high” culture (White 1992:164; Wolpe 1995:67-68).

The organisation of South African society and its relationship with media culture stems from the aim of upholding a capitalist economic base. The importance of who is in control of the economic base and the role of the state had profound effects on the superstructure and developments of South African television. The British Broadcasting

Corporation (BBC) formally started television broadcasting on 2 November 1936 (Bignell 2004:42). However, the new technology was not received enthusiastically by the South African Nationalist Government, which opposed the introduction of a television service on the grounds of a fear of exposing South African citizens, black and white, to international opinion and liberal thinking (Harrison & Joyce 2005:163). David Wigston (2001:12) states that the Nationalist Government “vehemently opposed the introduction of television on moral and ethical grounds”. Erstwhile Minister of Post and Telegraphs, Dr Albert Hertzog, referred to television as “the evil box”, “regarding the new media as a negative influence on society throughout the world” (Mersham 1998:211).

However, in 1971 the government appointed the Meyer Commission to look into the prospect of introducing television to South Africa (Wigston 2001:12). The commission suggested that the SABC should provide a television service under statutory control, “to advance the self-development of all its peoples and to foster their pride in their own identity and culture” (Mersham 1998:212). As this idea of state control was in alignment with the ideology of the government (Wigston 2001:12), it accepted the proposal to introduce a television service. The government announced on 27 April 1971 that the SABC was to provide a television service. Therefore, since its beginning, television in South Africa was subject to a monopoly provider of public service broadcasting under statutory control of the ruling National Party (Wigston 2001:12; Mersham 1998:212).

The SABC’s regular television service was officially launched on 5 January 1976 (Mersham 1998:212), 50 years after John Logie Baird’s first demonstration of television, and 40 years after the BBC started a regular television service. The morals and ideologies of the National Party thus delayed South African television considerably. South African television started with 37 hours of programmes per week, on one television channel, in both English and Afrikaans (Mersham 1998:212). The structure and policy of SABC television was based on the public broadcasting model of the BBC “in which public broadcasters aim to function as public resources that inform, educate and entertain” (Mersham 1998:212). This BBC model is also known as the Reithian tradition, named after John Reith, the first Director General of the BBC and the father of public service broadcasting (Mersham 1998:212; Teer-Tomaselli 2001:124). Reith held that “public service broadcasting should act as a national service. It should act as a powerful means of social unity, binding together groups, regions and classes through

the live relaying of national events”⁶ (Teer-Tomaselli 2001:124). For Reith, this “is best achieved when audiences share common cultural resources, and are subjected to a monopoly provider of a single service”⁷ (Teer-Tomaselli 2001:124).

Reithian tradition in South African television was palpable in the amount of education and information programmes, as well as the manner in which television entertainment did not cater for the interests of the general public; “the emphasis in the entertainment programmes tended to be on ‘high culture’, particularly aimed at white audiences, and not on the ‘soaps’ and sitcoms favoured by mass audiences, nor on programmes of interest to the black majority of South Africans” (Mersham 1998:212).

It is clear that from its inception South African television reflected the values and interests of the dominant class, or bourgeois minority, of the National Party government. When South African television advertising was introduced in 1978, SABC viewers (no matter what their class or race) are seen as buying into the values of separate development or apartheid by accepting, and even expecting the absence of black people in TV1 commercials (and the absence of white people in TV2/3 commercials from 1982 onwards) (Mersham 1998:212; White 1992:164).

For Mimi White (1992:164), there are important factors at play with regard to viewers buying into the meanings expounded upon on television. The first is the aspect of ownership. Since the “dominant class owns and operates the television industry – including production and programming – it is assumed that other sets of meanings and beliefs are rarely, if ever, given a full public airing” (White 1992:164). Other meanings and values, for example democracy, freedom of expression and plurality of views, were simply not available on South African television in the same manner as the values of

⁶ Teer-Tomaselli (2001:124) cites from Keane (1996:33).

⁷ Even before television was introduced in South Africa, the SABC and its radio programmes were based on the charter of the BBC. In 1934, the then South African Prime Minister, JBM Hertzog, invited John Reith to tour South Africa and “to recommend a new form of broadcasting for the country” (Teer-Tomaselli & De Villiers, 1998:153-154). According to these suggestions from Reith, the Draft Broadcasting Bill was introduced in March 1936. The Broadcasting Act of 1936 “assumed a consensus between English and Afrikaans speakers which in fact did not exist at the time. Representation was to be achieved through the Governor-General’s appointments to the Board of Control. Appointed persons were to be unaligned to any specific interest group within the country’s political landscape. Clearly, Reith was unaware of the degree of conflict which existed between the two main European language groups, and the political tendencies they represented, not to mention the implications of excluding black audiences” (Teer-Tomaselli & De Villiers 1998:153-154).

the dominant apartheid ideology. The second aspect for White (1992:164-154) is that of cultural norms, and she states that

all viewers participate in the society and culture on an ongoing basis and are able to understand it, whether or not it directly serves their interests. The process of having been raised and educated under the sway of certain dominant meanings and beliefs (ideology) establishes certain norms and expectations for all viewers.

The absence of programmes for and by black people, as well as the absence of programmes catering for politically Left groupings, was understood as the norm, whether or not this served the interests of South African viewers.

From its inception in 1976, SABC television propagated the ideas and cultural norms of apartheid under the statutory control of the National Party. In order to transform the ideological practices of television within a classical Marxist framework, “a shift in the mode of production – a total reorganisation of ownership and control of the medium” would be required (White 1992:165). The transformation and reorganisation of SABC television (and its practices of exclusion aligned with apartheid ideology) could occur in the following ways; a different group (perhaps the dominant class of a new government that opposes apartheid) had to take ownership of the television industry, or privatisation of the television industry had to occur. South African television thus had to be completely restructured to accommodate alternative views, which only took place on a large scale in the first half of the following decade (1990-1996).

The two above-mentioned aspects of ownership and cultural norms support the notion of ideology as a *false consciousness*. Classical Marxist writings (see Marx 1961; Marx & Engels 1970) tend to regard ideology as *false consciousness*, where ideology is “a complex production of illusory ideas about the way society works and in whose benefit” (White 1992:165). Heywood (2003:327) defines *false consciousness* as a “Marxist term denoting the delusion and mystification that prevents subordinate classes from recognizing the fact of their own exploitation”. Those who own and control the television medium can create a set of illusory ideas, or false or mistaken views of the world, and create systematic misrepresentations of it in order to serve the ruling class interest of control over the viewers or masses. The viewers or masses accept the beliefs and meanings expounded on television, no matter what their colour or position within the economic system, because separate development or apartheid has

systematically been misrepresented as the cultural norm. Ideology is when beliefs, such as separate development, are accepted as 'natural' when in fact they keep the status quo alive and perpetuate the class system of oppression (White 1992:165).

In short, classical Marxism holds the belief that, firstly, ideology is always determined by the material and economic conditions (the economic base determines the ideology), and secondly, that ideology is always a distortion of reality, or false consciousness (Sonderling 2001:315). There are some shortcomings and criticism regarding these classical Marxist notions of ideology, of which the criticism of economic determinism seems the most prominent.

Sonderling (2001:316) regards the classical Marxist notion that a person's ideology is always determined by his class or social position within the economic system, as a simplistic view, since the theory does not account for the personal experiences people have, and the ways in which these individual experiences influence people's world views. Another basic shortcoming for Sonderling (2001:316) is that the theory of ideology as false consciousness assumes "that there is true consciousness and that it is possible to understand reality from an objective point of view". For White (1992:166), the theory of false consciousness "does not explain how or why people so readily adopt ideas that would seem to be at odds with their own interests in society, especially their material interests".

Classical Marxist theory also does not explain how different and even contradictory ideologies can exist simultaneously (Sonderling 2001:316). Consequently, alternative approaches to ideology "stress contradictions within society (and within individual social subjects), the coexistence of competing ideological positions, and the ways in which individuals assume positions in relation to their social world" (White 1992:166).

2.3 Neo-Marxist concepts of ideology and South African television in the 1980s

Neo-Marxist critical theories have extended Marx's views and evolved beyond the notion that ideology is, in the first instance, always determined by the economic conditions, and in the second, that ideology is a false consciousness or distortion of reality. The neo-Marxist notions of ideology are most evident in the writings of Louis Pierre Althusser (1918-1990) and Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937).

Althusser (1971)⁸ rejects Marx's idea that ideology is a direct result of – and always determined by – the material conditions (or economic base) (Figure 1), and proposes a revision of the classical Marxist topographical base/superstructure metaphor of society (Figure 2). He agrees that the mode of production influences the character of society, but rejects the idea that the mode of production is a base that determines and supports the entire cultural superstructure (Althusser 1994:105). He suggests that society consists of various interrelated areas of social practice – economic, political, and ideological activities,⁹ and as White (1992:168) notes, “exert[s] mutual influence and pressure on one another but also operate with relative autonomy”.

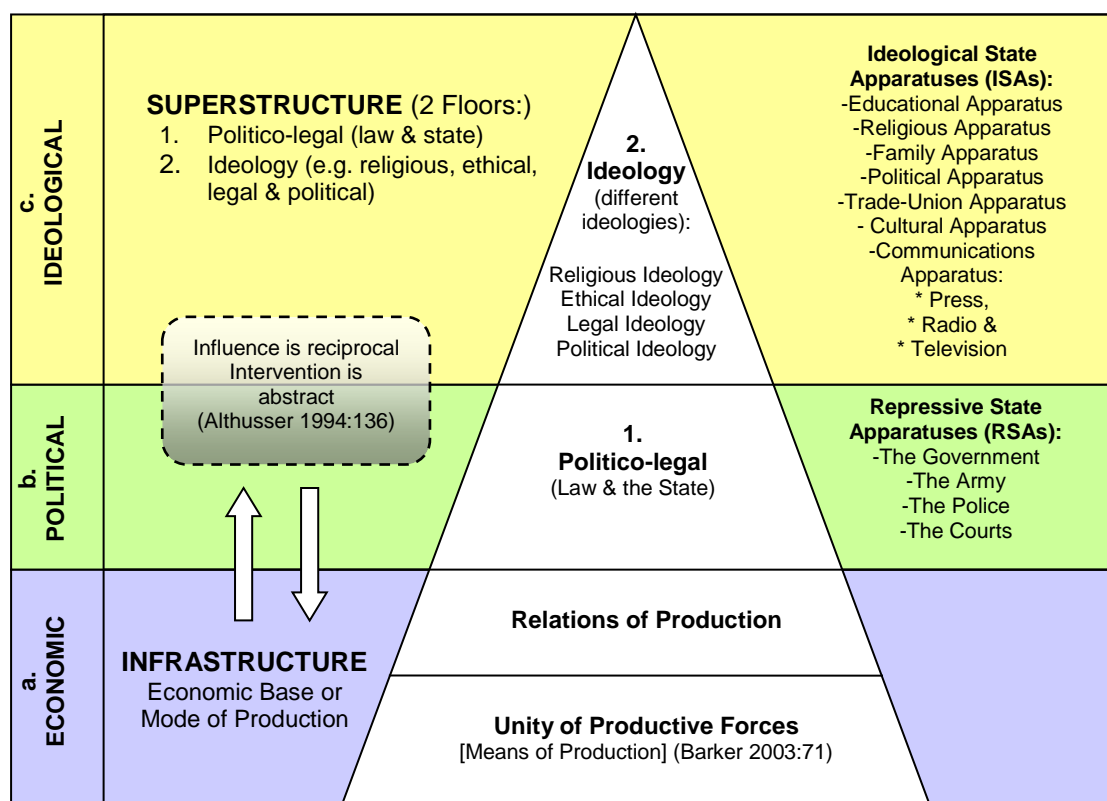


Figure 2: Schematic representation of the social formation (societal structure).
(Adapted from Althusser 1994:104-106.)

⁸ Althusser's article first appeared as 'Idéologies et appareils idéologiques d'état (Notes pour une recherche)' in the French journal *La Pensée* in June 1970. It was then reprinted as 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' in 1971 in the collection of Althusser's articles translated into English by Ben Brewster, entitled *Lenin and Philosophy* (London: New Left Books:123-173) and also New York: Monthly Review Press. Several reprintings of the article followed (Wolff [sa]:9; Harrison & Wood, 2003:953). The copy of the article used here is Althusser (1994 [1971]:100-140) that appears in *Mapping Ideology*, edited by Žižek (1994).

⁹ For Althusser, the economic, political and ideological practices make up the social formation. These areas of human practice “designate key arenas within which individuals find their identity in the social formation” (White, 1992:168).

According to Althusser's (1994:104-106) revision of the base/superstructure model, the mode of production and capitalist economic practice in South Africa, for example, will determine the political and ideological activities within the social formation or social practices of its society. However, "political and ideological practice are not necessarily direct reflections of economic practice but have a life of their own [... and] each sphere of social practice has its own structures, dynamics, and history" (White 1992:168). So instead of the classical Marxist notion of a one-way influence and enforcement of ideology from the base on the superstructure (Figure 1), Althusser suggests that each sphere (illustrated as levels a, b and c in Figure 2) – economic, political and ideological – influences the other reciprocally, while at the same time operating relatively autonomously.

Integral to Althusser's revised notion of ideology and the base/superstructure model of society, is his concept of Ideological State Apparatuses. Althusser (1994:106-113) reconsiders the classical Marxist theory of the State, and argues that it is necessary to distinguish between State power on the one hand, and the State Apparatus on the other which comprises two bodies. The one is "the body of institutions that represent the Repressive State Apparatus" (abbreviated here as RSA) and the other is "the body of institutions which represent the body of Ideological State Apparatuses" (abbreviated here as ISAs) (Althusser 1994:113).

Althusser's (1994:110-111) empirical list of ISAs includes the religious ISA (the system of the different churches); the educational ISA (the system of the different public and private schools); the family ISA, legal ISA, political ISA (the political system, including the different parties); the trade-union ISA; the communications ISA (press, radio and television); and the cultural ISAs (literature, the arts, sports, etc.). He maintains there is a *plurality* of Ideological State Apparatuses in society and that they are part of the *private* domain (Althusser 1994:111). However, more important than their plurality or their belonging to the private domain, is the manner in which they function. Ideological State Apparatuses function massively and predominantly by *ideology*, while also functioning secondarily by repression (Althusser 1994:112).

The other body of institutions that represent the Repressive State Apparatus, in contrast, "functions massively and predominantly by *repression* (including physical repression), while functioning secondarily by ideology" (Althusser 1994:111-112). The

Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) often functions by violence and is constituted by the government, the administration, the army, the police, the courts, and the prisons, for example (Althusser 1994:110). Althusser (1994:111) states that there is one Repressive State Apparatus, and this unified RSA “belongs entirely to the *public* domain”. The government, army and police are a part of the public domain while churches, some schools, families, most newspapers and cultural ventures (or ISAs), for example, are part of the private domain (Althusser 1994:111).

Observing the Althusserian version of a base/superstructure (Figure 2), it appears that both the ISAs and RSAs are part of the social formation’s superstructure. The RSAs function within the first floor of the superstructure, namely the politico-legal floor, or the floor of the law and the state (level b). The ISAs function within the second or top floor of the superstructure, the floor of ideology of which culture, art, education, communication and religion are a part (level c). Mass media and the SABC television channel brand identities are part of the top floor of the superstructure, of ideology (level c), and is also part of the communication ISA. According to Althusser’s theory, the SABC, its television channels and their brand identities will be influenced by the economic base and the politico-legal level of the superstructure. At the same time, the SABC television channels and their brand identities will influence the politico-legal level of the superstructure and the economic base while also operating with relative autonomy.

The SABC and its operations have long been regarded as a government mouthpiece or Ideological State Apparatus. As mentioned in the previous section, South African television was subjected to a monopoly provider (SABC) of public service broadcasting under statutory control of the ruling National Party since its inception in 1976 (Wigston 2001:12; Mersham 1998:212). In fact, public service broadcasting around the world has been characterised by centralised state control (Thompson 1990), so it is no surprise that this was the case during the height of apartheid (Mersham 1998:212; Tomaselli, Tomaselli & Muller, 1989). The SABC played an important role in the construction and support of apartheid structures (Teer-Tomaselli 2001:117). During the 1980s, “the SABC explicitly supported the then government in its efforts to combat the ‘Total Onslaught’ of revolutionary forces, seen to be spearheaded by the ANC [African National Congress] in exile” (Teer-Tomaselli 2001:117).

The entrenchment of apartheid ideology by means of, often conservative, Afrikaner cultural theory during the 1980s occurs through tight control of various ISAs (Mersham 1998:212). Mass media is an ISA that also allows for the expression of other ISAs. In other words, other ISAs such as the church, schools, family, language, culture and art, in addition to finding expression through their own media, also find expression through television. Religious views of the Dutch Reformed Church as an ISA, for example, find expression through religious programmes and topics on television, while patriarchal conservative notions of the family ISA penetrates, for example, dramas, comedies and sitcoms. This is also an example of Althusser's (1994:112) notion that diverse ISAs¹⁰ are unified through the ideology of "the ruling class". Television programmes, news and other content thus matched the ideals of apartheid ideology to preserve Afrikaans culture and promote Afrikaner nationalism.

The 1980s comprised a decade in which the RSAs of the National Party government were particularly visible. By the mid-1980s, a State of Emergency was declared and the police and army were employed to control the political unrest and violence in townships. Among other things, meetings and gatherings were banned, movement of people restricted, curfews imposed and political prisoners violently detained. Television news and the South African mass media generally reported on the State of Emergency in such a manner in order to promote the social norms, values, beliefs and ideas that would make people conform to society (Sonderling 2001:317) and the apartheid ideology imposed by the ruling class (National Party government). The SABC was thus an ISA and a propaganda tool that served the interests of the ruling class. Althusser (1994:112) states

[g]iven the fact that the 'ruling class' in principle holds State power (openly or more often by means of alliances between classes or class factions), and therefore has at its disposal the (Repressive) State Apparatus, we can accept the fact that this same ruling class is active in the Ideological State Apparatuses in so far as it is ultimately the ruling ideology which is realised in the Ideological State Apparatuses.

Althusser (1994:113) also states that "the Ideological State Apparatuses may not only be the stake, but also the site of class struggle, and often of bitter forms of class

¹⁰ John Fiske (1992:287) states that there are "no overt connections" between Ideological State Apparatuses, "yet they all perform similar ideological work. They are all patriarchal; they are all concerned with the getting and keeping of wealth and possessions; and they all endorse individualism and competition between individuals".

struggle”. The Soweto uprising of 16 June 1976 is such an example of the educational ISA as the stake and site of class struggle. Students from Soweto protested against the National Party’s education policy of tuition in Afrikaans, and Hector Pietersen and many other students were shot by police during the incident.¹¹ The communication ISAs, such as the press, radio and television, were also a site and subject of contestation during the dismantling of apartheid (Jacobs 2003). It is also Althusser’s (1994:112) opinion that “no class can hold State power over a long period without at the same time exercising its hegemony over and in the State Ideological Apparatuses”. It was thus imperative for the National Party government to maintain control over the SABC and other mass media institutions during the apartheid era.

In addition to Althusser’s contribution of the notion of ISAs and his revision of the structure of ideology, he contributes to an understanding of the functioning of ideology and the position of the individual therein. Within an Althusserian framework, “ideology is the system of representation in which people live their imaginary relationship to the real conditions of existence” (Sonderling 2001:317; Althusser 1994:123).¹² This is an imaginary relationship because “people cannot have a direct and objective view of a reality as there is no way that one can step out of ideology into some non-ideological position and measure how ideology distorts and misrepresents true reality” (Sonderling 2001:317). Therefore, ideology as a system of representation, creates a symbolic order which constitutes the individual, or rather, constitutes the subject.¹³

John Fiske (1992:288) explains the Althusserian conviction that all individuals are

¹¹ Media images of the past (such as the one of Hector Pietersen), often become the propaganda tools of the ISAs in the hands of the succeeding government to promote its own ideology.

¹² Althusser (1994:123,125) presents two theses, one negative, and one positive to approach his central thesis on the structure and functioning of ideology: firstly “ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” and secondly that “[i]deology has a material existence”. The central thesis regarding the functioning of ideology is that “[i]deology interpellates individuals as subjects” (Althusser 1994:128). Although Althusser’s concept represents a Neo-Marxist concept of ideology, it is a concept in close proximity to post-modern notions of ideology.

¹³ Fiske (1992:288) explains that the idea of the individual needs to be replaced by the idea of the subject. “The individual is produced by nature, the subject by culture. Theories of the individual concentrate on differences between people and explain these differences as natural. Theories of the subject, on the other hand, concentrate on people’s common experiences in a society as being the most productive way of explaining who (we think) we are” (Fiske 1992:288).

constituted as subjects-in-ideology by the ISAs, that the ideological norms naturalised in their practices constitute not only the senses of the world for us, but also our sense of ourselves, our sense of identity, and our sense of our relations to other people and to society in general. Thus we are each of us constituted as subjects in, and subjects to, ideology. The subject, therefore, is a social construction, not a natural one.

Within this context, there is no way that people can step out of this symbolic order of ideology, and therefore, “there is no such thing as being ‘outside’ ideology” (White 1992:170; Lemon 1996:212). In other words, if culture is ideological, and if every individual, group, society or culture has an ideology, one can say that the SABC and its television services are ideological. In the same way that there is no non-ideological point, the SABC cannot claim to be neutral, objective or ‘real’ since people’s sense of reality is constituted by various ideologies and other social, cultural and political elements that create a symbolic order.

Even if cultural texts oppose a certain ideology, it is important to take note that they cannot function outside the symbolic order of ideology. But more often than not, ideology functions more dexterously. Ideology is not always forced from the top down on the seemingly unsuspecting masses as the classical Marxist notion of ideology implies. Antonio Gramsci’s (1971)¹⁴ theory describes more accurately how people (or the ‘suppressed’ masses or proletariat) willingly participate in ideology and even accept their own subordination.

For Barker (2003:80), Gramsci’s work¹⁵ offers “a more flexible, sophisticated and practical account of the character and workings of ideology”. Gramsci’s (1971) major theoretical contribution is the concept of hegemony which describes “the *process*¹⁶ by which a dominant class wins the willing consent of the subordinate classes to the system that ensures their subordination” (Fiske 1992:291). Hegemony is a practice “... where a ‘historical bloc’ of ruling-class factions exercise social authority and leadership

¹⁴ Barker (2003:80) notes that even though “the work of Gramsci was written prior to Althusser’s, its influence within cultural studies post-dates the former’s enterprise (itself indebted to Gramsci). Indeed, the popularity of Gramsci within cultural studies was in partial response to the problems of Althusserian theory”.

¹⁵ Gramsci’s political and social writing appears to span from 1910 to 1935, and his seminal writing appears in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (1971) edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (see Gramsci 1971).

¹⁶ While the term Ideological State Apparatus refers to *means or mediums* of specialised institutions through which they propagate their social norms and values, hegemony refers to the *process* whereby willing consent is won.

over the subordinate classes ... through a combination of force, and more importantly, consent” (Barker 2003:80).

Terry Eagleton (1994:195) believes there is an explicit difference between ideology and hegemony, where hegemony refers to the consent a governing power wins as an alternative to ideology being forcibly imposed by the governing power. Consent is achieved when the ruling class interests are recognised and accepted by society as the prevailing interests, even though society itself is made up of a variety of conflicting class interests (White 1992:167). Hegemony thus describes “the general predominance of particular class, political, and ideological interests within a given society” (White 1992:167). The political and ideological ideas of the ruling class thus become the commonsense view for the majority of people (White 1992:167).

From the start, South African television channels developed along the lines of the ruling class interest to promote separate development. As previously stated, the first channel commenced broadcasting in both Afrikaans and English in 1976. Additional television channels emerged in the early 1980s. TV2 and TV3 were the first additional channels, and were initially launched together as TV2/3 on 1 January 1982. TV2 was broadcast in the Nguni languages and TV3 in the Sesotho languages (Mersham 1998:212; Wigston 2001:12). Mersham (1998:212) states that an additional entertainment service, TV4, was inaugurated in 1984. The programmes on this channel were mostly in English.

On 30 March 1985, TV2/3 split into two separate channels. This expansion of television channels situated TV1 as the dominant ‘white’ channel and TV2 and TV3 as the subsidiary ‘black’ channels. Orgeret (2004:150) writes that TV2 and TV3 “showed ‘black’ news, which differed considerably from the English and Afrikaans versions on TV1”. This separation or “divide was thus a hallmark of SABC news during apartheid [when] the news [items] were separately produced in different ethnic languages reflecting different news values and reinforcing the apartheid ideology of different development” (Orgeret 2004:150).

Separate channels created by the SABC for Afrikaans and English (or white) viewers on the one hand, and Nguni and Sesotho (or black) viewers on the other, create the illusion that such separation is commonsense. White (1992:167) maintains that

hegemony “appears to be spontaneous, even natural, but it is the historical result of the prestige enjoyed by the ruling class by virtue of their position and function in the world of production”.

During the 1980s, the National Party government, in concert with the SABC as an ISA of the ruling class, endeavoured to keep the dominant position of the hegemonic bloc intact by opposing participation of new broadcasting enterprises such as Bophuthatswana television (Bop-TV) and M-Net.¹⁷ As an initiative of the Government of Bophuthatswana, Bop-TV started broadcasting by means of the SABC’s distribution network on 31 December 1983 (Mersham 1993:183; Wigston 2001:13).

The new station deviated from the SABC’s approach by broadcasting popular international programmes and news that was less government influenced. This resulted in TV1 losing a large number of white viewers to Bop-TV (Wigston 2001:13; Mersham, 1993:183). Since this was in direct conflict with the aims of promoting the ruling class ideology of the National Party government, the SABC soon blocked the signals, restricting Bop-TV to Soweto only (Wigston 2001:13; Mersham 1993:183). It further became clear that Bop-TV¹⁸ gained popularity amongst TV2 and TV3 viewers, resulting in the further narrowing of signals down to certain areas of Soweto where mainly Tswana-speaking people resided (Wigston 2001:13; Mersham 1993:183).

Similarly, the government exerted control over the 1984 proposal to government for a subscription television service, M-Net. The government approved the proposal on the condition that M-Net would only broadcast entertainment programmes, and not news (Wigston 2001:13). M-Net was managed and owned by a consortium of the four major English and Afrikaans newspaper groups¹⁹ (Wigston 2001:14, 48) and commenced its broadcasting on 1 October 1986. “Effectively the new service was then not in

¹⁷ M-Net is the acronym for the subscription television channel *Electronic Media Network* (Wigston, 2001:14, 48).

¹⁸ Bop-TV continued to battle for existence. Wigston (2001:14) state that “[o]ver the years, Bop-TV has tried to expand its services to a larger part of South Africa but owing to opposition from the SABC it had little success. In 1988 Bop-TV hired transmitters and began broadcasting by satellite. On 1 March 1998, Bop-TV was formally incorporated into the SABC ... [but] continues to remain available only to a narrow audience located in the townships” (Wigston 2001:14). Bop-TV was closed down on 30 July 2003. The SABC maintained that Bop-TV was a financial burden, and would make way for two new regional television channels.

¹⁹ The four major press groups were Naspers (Nasionale Pers Limited); Caxton Limited (formerly Perskor and Kagiso); Independent Newspapers also known as the Argus Group; and Times Media Limited (Wigston, 2001:64-68).

competition with the SABC as an information provider, over which the government exerted a strong influence” (Wigston 2001:14). The possibility of competition to the ruling class ideology or the creation of a counter-hegemonic bloc was thus eliminated by the SABC.

The notion of power clearly comes to the fore with the above discussions. For Lemon (2001:374), hegemony is indeed “another way of referring to, or explaining, power [and] refers to a type of domination, by which the ruling classes try to win the voluntary approval or active consent and cooperation of the subordinate classes to the very system that ensures their subordination”. The Neo-Marxist “reformulation of a theory of ideology clearly indicates an important shift in Marxist thinking, and marks a definite move away from the notion of ideology as a distorted reflection of reality or as false consciousness” (Lemon 1996:213).

Althusser rejects Marx’s idea that the economic base of society always establishes the entire cultural superstructure, and instead, proposes a theory that “not only allows the superstructure to influence the base but also produces a model of the relationship between ideology and culture that is not determined solely by economic relations” (Fiske 1992:286). Both Althusser and Gramsci “open the way for the analysis of culture as a set of practices instead of seeing artefacts as fixed entities with specific, hidden ideological meanings waiting to be exposed by the Marxist critic” (White 1992:169-170). Althusser and Gramsci also provided the theoretical foundation of a cultural studies approach by focusing on individuals as social subjects who both construct and are constructed by systems of representation (Lemon 1996:213).

2.4 The Cultural Studies approach to ideology and South African television in the 1990s

The work of Althusser and Gramsci²⁰ greatly influenced the essentially Marxist tradition of Cultural Studies (Fiske 1992:284-285). Cultural Studies as a discipline was

²⁰ Barker (2003:82) notes that Gramsci campaigns for cultural studies when he states that “it would be interesting to study concretely the forms of cultural organisation which keep the ideological world in movement within a given country and to examine how they function in practice”. Barker (2003:82) cites Gramsci from Bennet *et al* (1981:195-196). For Barker (2003:82), “Gramscian concepts within cultural studies proved to be of long-lasting significance ... because of the central importance given to popular culture as a site of ideological struggle”. Gramsci “makes ideological struggle and conflict within civil society the

established with the founding of the University of Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in 1964 by Richard Hoggart²¹ (Lemon 1996:213; Fiske 1992:284; Kellner 2001:1; Kellner 2004:8; Bignell 2004:23). The three founding Figures of the Birmingham group, Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams and EP Thompson initiated cultural theory with an analysis of working class culture and a critique of capitalism (Carnie 2003:[sp]).

The foundation of cultural studies was based on Hoggart's *The uses of literacy* (1957), Williams's *Culture and society* (1958), *The long revolution* (1961), and EP Thompson's *The making of the English working class* (1964) (Schulman, 1993:[sp]). Hoggart and Williams were literary critics interested in the subject of popular working class culture as opposed to elite or high culture (Carnie 2003:[sp]). For Thompson, class is the main point of focus, which for him is a social and cultural formation and a fluid historical event that cannot be understood as a static structure or category (Carnie 2003:[sp]).

The above left-wing intellectuals of the CCCS tried to preserve the culture of the working class in the light of the concomitant mass culture emanating from the culture industries (Kellner 2004:7), encouraging the view that culture (such as radio, music, television, radio) was important to define one's class position as well as identity, and that such cultural activities were enmeshed with the British society and economy (Bignell 2004:47).

Cultural Studies theories argue that what shapes everyday life is derived from the ways wealth-producing businesses in a country place people as workers or owners in such industries (Bignell 2004:47). For Hoggart, Williams and Thompson a change in people's relationship to work and wealth and also a debate and struggle for change in culture itself would improve social structures and people's everyday conditions of existence (Bignell 2004:47). These authors worked in a socialist, working class arena where the working class was advocating social change and wanted to reject the inequalities of the prevailing capitalist system for a more inclusive society (Kellner 2004:7).

central arena of cultural politics, with hegemonic analysis the mode of gauging the relevant balance of forces".

²¹ Hall succeeded Hoggart as director of the CCCS in 1968.

British Cultural Studies emerged in the 1960s during a time of increased resistance to consumer capitalism, times of social struggles and revolutionary movements such as the women's liberation movement and the black civil rights movement (Kellner 2004:7). The Birmingham group initiated a number of critical approaches that could be used to analyse, interpret, and critique cultural artefacts (Kellner 2004:8). By the 1970s, under Hall, the focus shifted to media texts as sources of examples of how ideology inscribes the ideas of the dominant groups in society (Schulman 1993:[sp]).

The "re-reading of Gramsci in the late 1970s, in light of race and gender studies, did a lot to set in motion the Centre's reassessment of popular culture – seen until that time as merely an ideological vehicle for inflicting dominant paradigms of experience and certain culture – and class-based assumptions advantageous to the status quo" (Schulman 1993:[sp]). The focus of the CCCS increasingly shifted to conceptualise popular culture as a potential area of conflict (Schulman 1993:[sp]). The Birmingham group thus involved in the social conflict regarding *inter* class and media culture, and were among the first to examine the effects of newspapers, radio and film on audiences (Kellner 2004:8).

The work of the CCCS indicates a great restructuring of the cognitive map of society and the power relations therein. Restructuring within the South African broadcasting environment during the 1990s occurred along similar lines as the changes instigated by the CCCS and the consequent inclusion of marginalised and disempowered groups. Changes in the SABC during the 1990s were not only occurring on economic levels, but also in terms of policies regarding gender and race. Generally the 1990s marks a decade of great changes in television. Globally, the developments in digital satellite technology contributed to distinguish the 1990s as a decade of increasingly competitive broadcasting environments and the decade of global audiences (Mersham 1998:207-209).

On a more negative side, state television organisations around the globe were affected by "government cuts, spiralling costs and declining revenues" (Mersham 1998:207). The SABC faced similar difficulties as it prepared for its own major restructuring on business-oriented lines to meet the challenges of the increasingly competitive broadcasting environment (Development [sa]:2). In addition to large technological and

economic changes, South Africa and the SABC continued to experience remarkable democratic transformation (Mersham 1998:208).

The Viljoen Task Group was appointed by the government in 1990 in order to investigate the future direction of broadcasting in South Africa (Wigston 2001:14-15; Mersham 1998:213). Criticism towards the Viljoen's Commission included a concern that findings might be within the ideology of, and biased towards the promotion of, the Nationalist Government by the SABC (Wigston 2001:16). Another criticism was that the Viljoen Task Group was unrepresentative, as it did not "include any blacks [or] females, [nor did it] represent the advertising and marketing sectors" (Mersham 1998:213).

During the time of investigation by the Viljoen Task Group, numerous organisations, political parties and national forums "were actively campaigning for the restructuring of broadcasting in South Africa, [and] presented memoranda on the future regulation of [broadcasting] in South Africa" (Mersham 1998:213). The report of the Viljoen Task Group was released in 1991,²² and showed that dramatic changes needed to be made to broadcasting in South Africa (Wigston 2001:16). One of the recommendations made by the commission was that South African broadcasting should be restructured and that the SABC should have a public broadcasting role (Louw 1992:10; Wigston 2001:15). Another important recommendation was the setting up of an Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) (Wigston 2001:15).

The IBA was established after the Multi-Party Negotiation Forum took place in 1993; the IBA Act was passed by Parliament in October 1993. The IBA's responsibilities included "conduct[ing] public enquiries into broadcasting issues; ensur[ing] a broadcast industry free of political control and influence;²³ regulat[ing] the broadcast industry and telecommunications; and encourag[ing] new stations among interested private and community parties" (Mersham 1998:213), as well as ensuring South African broadcasting services provided for regular news services; actuality programmes on matters of public interest; programmes on political issues of public interest; and programmes on matters of international, national, regional and local -significance

²² According to Louw (1992:10), the "Viljoen Report was a clear expression of the NP's agenda which tries to ensure that any new non-NP government coming to power does not inherit the same all-powerful broadcast system the NP had itself controlled for over four decades".

²³ Wigston (2001:16) explains that the SABC had to be distanced from the government "in order to give the SABC greater credibility as a purveyor of news and information, particularly regarding the upcoming democratic elections in South Africa during 1994".

(Mersham 1998:214). The IBA's duty was to ensure that South African broadcasting services "develop and protect a national and regional identity, culture and character" (Teer-Tomaselli 2001:117).

The IBA carried out a 'Triple Enquiry' into the protection and viability of public broadcasting services; cross-media control of broadcasting services; and locally-produced television content (Teer-Tomaselli 2001:117; Mersham 1998:214), and report was released in September 1995, stating the IBA's intention to regulate satellite broadcasting (Mersham 1998:214) and recommended that another private television licence should be granted²⁴ to a free-to-air commercial channel in addition to the one held by M-Net (Mersham 1998:214). The report imposed significant local content programming quotas²⁵ on public broadcasting services. For Teer-Tomaselli (2001:128-129), this seemed to address two separate, but interlinking goals, namely "the ideological, directed towards the purpose of building a nation and an identity [and] the economic, directed towards the development of a film, television and recording industry".

In the same year as the IBA Act (1993), the SABC appointed its first post-apartheid, democratically elected 25-member Board, albeit criticised (Ten Years of Broadcasting 2003:1). The board was headed by Dr. Ivy Matsepe-Cassaburi, and was tasked to transform "a former state broadcaster into a fully fledged public broadcaster [that committed to] deliver full-spectrum services to all South Africans in all parts of the country, and in each of the eleven official languages" (Teer-Tomaselli 2001:118).

Changes in South African television during the early 1990s are thus land marked by the establishment of the IBA and the democratic election of the SABC board. Yet the SABC struggled financially owing to non-payment of licence fees and piracy, and the failure of the Astrasat project²⁶ in 1998 (Wigston 2001:20). Additionally, it still had to deal with the problem of credibility, low staff morale and various scandals, resulting in a rapid management turnover (Wigston 2001:21).

²⁴ This license was granted in April 1998 to E.tv – a black empowerment broadcasting initiative (Wigston, 2001:21-24).

²⁵ In order to meet its specific mandate as public broadcaster, "a median of 50% of local content was set for the SABC, to be complied with over three years" (Teer-Tomaselli, 2001:129-130).

²⁶ The Astrasat project was an analogue free-to-air satellite service that began operating during July 1996 (Wigston, 2001:20).

Ideology in South African television during the 1990s became increasingly complex. The organising of the SABC television channels in the 1990s (see Appendix 1) illustrates how culture and specific platforms of South African culture become sites of struggle. Politics and the “interplay of representations and ideologies of class, gender, race, ethnicity, and nationality” (Kellner 2004:8) became central to the institutional organisation of the SABC and its television channels. The Birmingham CCCS “focused on how various audiences interpreted and used media culture in varied and different ways and contexts, analysing the factors that made audiences respond in contrasting ways to media texts” (Kellner 2004:8).

Previously, SABC television channels were organised in terms of language and differences of ethnicity among South African viewers. Even though the SABC still favoured the National Party in the first half of the 1990s, it was beginning to reflect the future changes in the political dispensation (Jacobs 2003). It would not be useful for the SABC to suddenly structure the television channels according to a singular, unified ideology in anticipation of political changes, since this process would include some viewers and alienate others. Theorists of the Birmingham CCCS proposed “that society is not a unified collection of people that accept one particular ideology [and] is more dynamic and characterized by many conflicting ideologies rather than a single ideology” (Sonderling 2001:319). The various economic, social, cultural differences of SABC television viewers and the conflicting ideologies they espouse had to be incorporated and accommodated in the restructuring of the SABC channels in a democratic way. This was a big task demanding restructuring, constant revision, refinement and adjustment. The SABC television channels were subjected to two attempts at restructuring, one in the first half of the 1990s, and the other in the second half of the decade.

In 1990 the SABC consisted of four television channels, namely TV1, TV2, TV3 and TV4. In addition to these four channels, the SABC launched the TSS (Top Sport Surplus) channel in 1990. Initially, the TSS channel carried the sports programmes that could not be accommodated by the TV1 schedule (Mersham 1998:212; Development [sa]:2). Soon, TSS “developed into a channel in its own right, but was limited to broadcasting in and around metropolitan areas” (Mersham 1998:212). In January 1992, TV2, TV3 and TV4 were merged into a multicultural channel called CCV-TV (Contemporary Community Values Television) and this amalgamation “reflected a

radical departure from previous policy which was based firmly on the language and ethnic differentiation of viewers” in that it aimed to broadcast programmes that would attract viewers from all cultural groupings (Mersham 1998:214).

Mersham (1998:213) describes the changes on CCV-TV as cosmetic, however, since “substantive change at political level had yet to occur”. Since TV1 was considered to be the main SABC channel during the apartheid era, and broadcast in Afrikaans and English, CCV-TV was grounded as the ‘other’ channel when “television had largely served segregated audiences in segregated languages” (Mersham 1998:214).

On 11 February 1994 the TSS channel was discontinued and replaced by NNTV (National Network Television) (Development of broadcasting ... [sa]:2). This channel became a kind of “alternative, experimental channel carrying a wide diversity of material” (Mersham 1998: 212-213) and aimed to provide a platform for free speech and democratic, non-racist standards. The SABC also broke new ground when it introduced regional television on 5 February 1996,²⁷ broadcasting in the Western Cape, Northern Province, Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal (Ten Years ... 2003:6). This was aimed at breaking away from SABC2’s national network “on weekdays to broadcast news and information specifically focused on, and in the languages of, the targeted provinces” (Ten Years ... 2003:6).

Although some progressive changes occurred within the SABC during the early half of the 1990s, it was not until the restructuring during the second half of the 1990s that major assumptions about groups of viewers or the distinction of specific South African demographic groups²⁸ presented themselves on television channels. Bignell (2004:23) states that Cultural Studies “recognise the significance of popular television and studies how television contributes to assumptions and attitudes of sectors of society, a set of ideas and emotions described as a ‘structure of feeling’”.

²⁷ During 1999 the regional split programmes were discontinued after funding from the government was stopped. However, the SABC retained the regional programme for the Northern Province, Mopani, at its own cost. This, too, was later discontinued (Ten Years ... 2003:6).

²⁸ The distinction between certain groups of people in South Africa traditionally occurs firstly on the basis of race, and then class, while class was the major distinguishing factor in European countries

In other words, groups within South African society may have their own assumptions and attitudes, and television fuels these assumptions with structures of feeling or sets of ideas and emotions. Viewers ascribe different meaning to television content, and may interpret such content in a different manner than intended by the producer of the television text. Stuart Hall's essay, *Encoding, Decoding*²⁹ (1980), provides a theory of how messages are produced and issued, particularly television (During 1999:507). Hall's essay posits that television programmes are "open texts" and thus mean different things to different people (Fiske 1992:292).

According to Hall's theory of "preferred reading",³⁰ there are inherent power and ideology structures within television. Hall (1999:513) notes that signs and codes on television belong to "the 'maps of meaning' into which any culture is classified; and those 'maps of social reality' have the whole range of social meanings, practices, and usages, power and interest 'written in' to them". Television content thus presents maps of social reality that are embedded with social meanings and ideologies. This happens because a society or culture enforces its classifications of the social, cultural and political world, and these imposed classifications constitute a dominant cultural order (Hall 1999:513). The dominant cultural order and the "different areas of social life appear to be mapped out into discursive domains, hierarchically organised into dominant or preferred meanings" (Hall 1999:513).

These are *dominant* or preferred because they have the institutional, political, or ideological order imprinted in them (Hall 1999:513). The other two positions of meaning are *negotiated* and *oppositional* readings by the viewers. Television becomes the domain for *dominant* or preferred meaning, and such domains of preferred meanings "have the whole social order embedded in them as a set of meanings, practices and beliefs: the everyday knowledge of social structures, of 'how things work for all practical purposes in this culture', the rank order of power and interest and the structure of legitimations, limits and sanctions" (Hall 1999:513).

²⁹ This essay was originally published as "Encoding and Decoding in Television Discourse" in 1973. The essay also appears as *Encoding/Decoding* in 1980, in *Culture, Media, Language*, edited by Stuart Hall *et al* London: Hutchinson, p128-139. Simon During's (1999:507-517) edition of Hall's article, *Encoding, Decoding*, is used here.

³⁰ The dominant, negotiated and oppositional readings described by Hall's (1999) theory of preferred reading are applied in Chapter Four of the study.

According to Hall's theory, one can expect post-1994 South African television to contain "maps of social reality" that will convey the dominant cultural order of a post-apartheid South Africa, and that the SABC will impose its classifications of the social, cultural and political world in order to constitute the new dominant cultural order. The dominant cultural order set in place by the new African National Congress (ANC) government is significantly different to the preceding cultural order set in place by the National Party government, and the structure and content of SABC television as a state-owned public broadcaster had to be redesigned to accommodate a new cultural order.

As mentioned previously, the redesigning and restructuring of the SABC³¹ started with the first democratically elected Board and the establishment of the IBA in 1993, and the coming to power of the ANC in 1994 (Lewis 2000:163). The SABC was restructured according to the mandate from the IBA "to transform itself into a broadcaster which served the public's needs and reflected the population's diversity" (Mersham 1998:214). The task of transforming the former *state* broadcaster into a fully fledged *public* broadcaster was constantly negotiated, and a new framework for the SABC's programme content, including visions and values such as nation building, and the promotion of the 'African Renaissance' were established as primary goals in the second half of the 1990s (Teer-Tomaselli 2001:118).

The SABC

declared a commitment to deliver full-spectrum services to all South Africans, in all parts of the country, and in each of the 11 official languages. Their programme content is aimed at protecting and nurturing South African culture and creativity, and reflecting the reality of South Africa to itself and to the world; a South Africa from a distinctly South African perspective (Teer-Tomaselli 2001:118).³²

³¹ Teer-Tomaselli (2001:118) states that the SABC, prior to restructuring, only "served the interest of the middle classes only: predominantly white, 'coloured' and Indian, with an increasingly large percentage of black people falling into this category".

³² Teer-Tomaselli (2001:118) cites from Launch SABC television: Commemorative publication on the re-launch of the SABC's television channels, a document released in 1996 by the SABC.

Nation building as an over-riding consideration is evident in the SABC's guidelines for programming content.³³ Teer-Tomaselli (2001:125) quotes the following from the 1996 guidelines:

In a multi-cultural society, the SABC needs to ensure not only that the diversity is reflected, but that it is reflected positively ... Programmes should contribute to a sense of nation building and should not in any way disparage the lifestyle or belief systems of any specific cultural group or in any way attack the integrity of such a group, unless it is established to be in the public interest. However, the news and beliefs of different groups are obviously open to honest, thoughtful scrutiny in programmes like documentaries.

Not only does the SABC task itself with the project of nation building, but it also commits to the rebirth of the whole continent as a promoter of the African Renaissance (Teer-Tomaselli 2001:127-128). The SABC thus successfully aligns itself with the policies and ideologies of the new ANC government.

As a result, the three multicultural television channels were re-launched to reinforce rebirth, nation building and social solidarity. The channels were re-launched on 4 February 1996,³⁴ replacing CCV-TV, TV1 and NNTV and naming the new channels, SABC1, SABC2 and SABC3 (Mersham 1998:214; Development of broadcasting ... [sa]:3; Ten Years ... 2003:5-6). The new channels were the result of much research and public opinion and aimed at replacing the channels created under the previous twenty-year apartheid era (Ten Years ... 2003:5-6).

The aim of the re-launch was to "move closer to delivering public broadcasting by providing more of the country's eleven official languages, as well as ensuring that the seven which were already broadcast, did so with greater equity" (Teer-Tomaselli 2001:118). For the first time in South African television, all 11 official languages and a variety of cultural content were included in programme schedules, but the majority of programmes continued to be in English (Ten Years ... 2003:5-6; Mersham 1998:214).

³³ See, for example, SABC request for proposals (2005, 2006 and 2008).

³⁴ The re-launch of the SABC's TV and radio portfolios were introduced at an evening launch party at the Waterkloof Air Force base. Three thousand invited guests attended the launch which ended with a "magnificent fireworks display" (Ten Years ... 2003:5-6). Lavish or decadent parties such as this one held by parastatal and government organisations are indicative of a hedonistic post-apartheid trend fixated on self-gratification, appearances and "image" rather than the actual resolving of deep underlying economic, sociological and political problems caused by the previous apartheid regime.

The new channels “were to be the visible face of the SABC’s commitment to transform from a commercially driven state broadcaster to a programme and audience driven public broadcaster [and directed] itself to serve the needs of the new South Africa” (Ten Years ... 2003:6).

The structure, maps of social reality (Hall 1999:513) and the positioning of viewers during and after the reconfiguration of the three SABC channels in 1996 remained similar and set the tone for the channel identities succeeding this decade. The CCV-TV channel, itself made up of the old TV2, TV3, and TV4 channels created in the 1980s, moved from the margins to the centre as it was repositioned as the number one channel, named SABC1 (Television in South Africa [sa]). With its repositioning, it is important to note that the channel that is numbered ‘one’ has always been associated with the ruling class political ideologies of the day; TV1 with the apartheid ideologies and now SABC1 with the ideologies of the ‘New South Africa’. This channel is thus of particular interest in visual analysis to determine which signs, codes and ideological meanings are represented by the ruling hegemonic bloc.

SABC1 was branded with the slogan *Simunye, We Are One* and emphasised the Nguni family of languages (IsiZulu, IsiXhosa, IsiNdebele and Siswati) (Teer-Tomaselli 2001:131; Wigston 2001:33). SABC1 had the largest footprint or signal distribution network in the 1990s, and programmes were broadcast in the Nguni languages during peak hours, while the morning and afternoon schedules were a mixture of the Nguni languages interspersed with English (Teer-Tomaselli 2001:118). Wigston (2001:33) notes that the SABC1 channel “focuse[d] on nation-building projects based in the community” and aimed the spotlight at “edutainment with a strong focus on health and social issues”. SABC1 targeted younger viewers and covered the largest average daily adult audience of 8,613 million in the 1990s (Wigston 2001:33).

SABC1 and its 1996 *Simunye, We Are One* brand identity creates a “map of social reality” (Hall 1999:513) that conveys the dominant cultural order of a post-apartheid South Africa. In a discussion on television game shows, Desiree Lewis (2000:155-177) notes how the new brand identity of the SABC1 captures the myth of the newly elected government; the ‘rainbow nation’. Lewis (2000:163) describes how the channel’s advertisement “includes images of its racially and linguistically diverse presenters united in a spirit of exuberant camaraderie – as though they themselves embodied the

new society of different, but united peoples”. The SABC1 advertisement reproduces the hegemonic ‘rainbow nation’ definitions of a post-apartheid nation, thus representing definitions of situations and events which are “in dominance” or preferred, as Hall (1999:516) puts it.

The transition to a democratic nation is a challenging situation, and the transformation of the SABC could be perceived similarly. The *Simunye* brand identity is a strategy or ideology that aims to resolve such challenges or “conflict around competing interests and identities through the audience’s being persuaded that ‘you are us’, that ‘since we work happily together, then so do you’” (Lewis 2000:163). The new identity of SABC1 obliterates possible conflict, thereby neutralising the hegemonic powers of the dominant channel’s underlying ideologies. Lewis (2000:163-165) writes that SABC1’s new identity, *Simunye, We Are One*, reflects a sense of unity and

provided the audience with a gratifying and purely symbolic arena for negotiating the difficulties of living in a world of polarized interests around scarce resources, of violence and political uncertainty. They offered a safe and mythical space for redefining subjectivity, where the individual ‘you’ became the communal ‘we’ [...]. SABC1’s advertisement, and especially its catchy signature tune, ‘Simunye’, held out fictive opportunities of transcendence through appreciating and identifying with a fantasy of ‘oneness’.

Lewis (2000:163) explains that this is an example of the success and adroitness of hegemony where an agreement is reached amongst viewers to consent to a “ruling-class imperative even when this message does not reflect the interest of society’s antagonistic groups”. If viewers interpret the advertisement as it was intended, they assume the dominant-hegemonic³⁵ position and accept the ideology or subjectivity it produces (Hall 1999:515; Fiske 1992:292). With such a *dominant* reading, the code seems transparent or natural (Hall 1999:515; Chandler 2002:192).

TV1 was re-launched as SABC2 in 1996 and was popularised with the catch-phrase *Come Alive with Us* (Teer-Tomaselli 2001:131). SABC2 is the second largest channel, broadcasting to an average daily adult audience of 6,199 million in the 1990s (Wigston

³⁵ Hall (1999:516) states that the “definition of a hegemonic viewpoint is, first, that it defines within its terms the mental horizon, the universe, of possible meanings, of a whole sector of relations in a society or culture; and, second, that it carries with it the stamp of legitimacy – it appears coterminous with what is ‘natural’, ‘inevitable’, ‘taken for granted’ about the social order”.

1999:33). Teer-Tomaselli (2001:131) notes that the SABC2 was the first channel to reach the revised quota of 30% local television content within the first two years of implementation. The channel has a strong signal network in the northern part of the country (Teer-Tomaselli 2001:118) and presents programming in four separate language groups, namely the Sesotho family of languages (Sesotho, Setswana and Sepedi), Xitsonga, TshiVenda and Afrikaans (Wigston 2001:33). Other programmes on SABC2 are in English or are multilingual (Wigston 2001:33).

Mersham (1998:215) states that the most significant changes to South African television during the 1990s were related to mixed cultural and language content, since this was not the case in preceding decades; “In the two decades of broadcasting during the apartheid era, television had largely served segregated audiences in segregated languages, in line with the policies of the government of the day”.³⁶

Languages on television after 1996 were, however, rearranged and segregated in a different manner – not in terms of the skin colour of viewers, but in terms of their culture or ethnicity. The ‘map of social reality’ created by SABC2 (and SABC1 and SABC3) and its categorisation of culture reveals that it is possible that the dominant hegemonic bloc regards the Sesotho family of languages, as well as the Xitsonga, Tshivenda and Afrikaans languages, to be situated at the periphery, while the Nguni languages (IsiZulu, IsiXhosa, IsiNdebele and Siswati) are given preference and situated at the centre by virtue of their position on the number one channel, SABC1. The languages and cultures presented on SABC2 are thus placed in opposition to the languages and cultures presented on SABC1, thereby positioning the SABC2 as the ‘other’ channel. It is possible that an oppositional position to the new restructuring of channels may be taken by SABC2’s Sesotho, Setswana, Sepedi, Xitsonga, Tshivenda and Afrikaans viewers.

Hall (1999:515-516) maintains that the *oppositional* or counter-hegemonic position is taken when the viewer decodes the message in a contrary way. Mersham (1998:214-215) notes that “Afrikaans speaking segments were greatly dissatisfied with the reduction in Afrikaans programming on SABC-TV channels in the mid- to late 1990s [and that users] of the lesser spoken north-eastern languages, for example Xitsonga and Tshivenda, were also not satisfied with the percentage airtime granted their

³⁶ Mersham (1998:215) cites from SABC (1996a:2).

languages on television”. These SABC2 viewers take up an oppositional relation to the dominant code behind the restructuring of SABC channels. SABC2 viewers may understand the preferred reading of the restructuring of the SABC channels according to mixed cultural and language content, but do not necessarily share its code of preference towards the Nguni languages and cultures, and may reject the marginal position laid out for them by the restructuring process (Hall 1999:517; Chandler 2002:192).

SABC3 took over the signal distribution of NNTV, and was branded with the slogan *Quality Shows* (Development of broadcasting ... [sa]; Teer-Tomaselli 2001:131). SABC3 has the smallest signal footprint covering the predominantly urban areas (Teer-Tomaselli 2001:118). Wigston (2001:33) notes that during the 1990s the restricted terrestrial transmitter only reached 56 percent of the total population in comparison with the 72 percent for SABC1 and 76 percent for SABC2. SABC3 in the late 1990s was a predominantly English channel that broadcast very few multilingual programmes (Wigston 2001:33; Teer-Tomaselli 2001:118,131); for example, Tsivenda and Xitsonga programmes were seldom broadcast and the channel did not reach the required quota of 30 percent local television content (Teer-Tomaselli 2001:118, 131). The channel catered for a “more upwardly mobile audience” (Teer-Tomaselli 2001:131) with a larger variety of programmes originating from Britain, the United States, Canada and Australia (Wigston 2001:33). SABC3 transformed from “a channel that was mainly educational in orientation, to one with a bias for family entertainment and more specialised and niche programming that proved popular on the previous NNTV” (Wigston 2001:33).

The other position that Hall (1999:516) identifies, the *negotiated* position, “contains a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements [and] accords the privileged position to the dominant definitions of events while reserving the right to make a more negotiated application to ‘local conditions’” (Hall 1999:516). The “negotiated version of the dominant ideology is thus shot through with contradictions, though these are only on certain occasions brought to full visibility” (Hall 1999:516). It is possible that SABC3 viewers partly accept the preferred reading and the position of the new SABC3 channel in terms of the restructuring of the SABC, but sometimes resist and modify it to reflect their own position, experiences and interests (Chandler 2002:192).

According to Teer-Tomaselli (2001:118) English was mainly used as the core language as it is widely understood as a second language in South Africa, and further, there exists a wide choice to draw from in the international arena. The restructuring of the SABC in 1996 claimed to create a unique South African broadcasting environment, but SABC3 relies heavily on international, popular programming, thereby neglecting its role to promote local, African television content. It is thus contradictory to the ideals of the SABC during the 1990s, since instead of cultivating African norms, it continues to promote western ideals. Viewers may adopt a negotiated reading of the new channel identity by accepting the Western programming content on the premise that English is a core language understood by most South Africans. The local conditions and the lack of local productions (owing to high costs) are seen as an exception to the general rule (Chandler 2002:192).

Hall's theory of preferred reading with its proposal of the possible dominant, negotiated and oppositional reading positions of the viewer is valuable, since "it frees the text from complete ideological closure, making the text open to many different interpretations" (Lemon 1996:217). Another benefit is that Hall's theory "shifts the focus away from the text towards the recipient as the site where meanings are ascribed or attributed" (Lemon 1996:217). David Morley,³⁷ on the other hand, considers Hall's three categories to be too simplistic since there are, in reality, few purely dominant or purely oppositional readings (Lemon 1996:217). Morley is of the opinion that Hall's theory of preferred reading "overemphasised the role of class [and] underestimated the variety of readings that could be made" (Fiske 1992:300).

Fiske (1992:301) states that Morley's study led to a theory of discourse, as opposed to class, for the reasons of various interpretations of TV, and goes on to explain that a discourse is

a socially produced way of talking or thinking about a topic. It is defined by reference to the area of social experience that it makes sense of, to the social location from which that sense is made, and to the linguistic or signifying system by which that sense is both made and circulated. [...] A discourse, then, is a socially located way of making sense of an important area of social experience.

³⁷ Lemon (1996:217) cites from Morley (1980a) and Fiske (1992:300-302) cites from Morley (1980b).

Television is a text made up from various discourses and the viewers' consciousness also consists of multiple discourses through which to make sense of their social experience (Fiske 1992:301-302). Ideology then refers to a discursive practice that constantly negotiates individual experience within a social formation where economic, political and ideological practices exert mutual influence on one another, on individuals and on cultural productions (White 1992:168). The act of reading a television text is "the moment when the discourses of the reader meet the discourses of the text" (Fiske 1992:302). The reading or interpretation of the television text is a constant process of negotiation between the text and the recipient, between the social meanings and sense inscribed in the programme and the meanings of social experience ascribed to it by its various recipients (Fiske 1992:302; Lemon 1996:217). The constant negotiation and the struggle for meaning reveal that it is possible for a text to have many potential meanings; therefore the text is polysemic.

In other words, a text will be read and "constructed differently depending on the discourses (knowledge, prejudice, resistances) *brought to bear on the text by the reader*" (Morley 1980a:171). Morley (1980a:170-171) insists that the meaning of a text cannot be deduced from its "textual characteristics" only, and must be considered in relation to the historical conditions of its production and consumption, in relation to the reader's economic, political and ideological positions, and in relation to the different strands of ideologies and discourses in struggle. An analysis of ideology in a cultural text might therefore not always be easily identifiable, and often analyses reveal a multitude of ideologies that correspond to polysemic interpretations of cultural texts.

This implies that SABC viewers engage in a constant negotiation between the social meanings inscribed by the SABC in the restructuring of the television channels and the personal or social meanings that they ascribe to the texts. A reader, or SABC television viewer, will interpret the newly restructured SABC channels and their brand identities in terms of its visual and textual characteristics, the post-apartheid capitalist conditions in which the channels are produced, and in terms of their own personal economic, political and ideological positions (for example class, race and gender positions). Interpretation of the new television channels and the restructuring of the SABC thus becomes a discursive practice. Since recipients bring their own discourses or sets of knowledge, experience, prejudice, attitudes and political views to the table, the new

television channels will have different meanings for different viewers, and thus become polysemic.

Prior to the Cultural Studies approach, the focus was on the political economy of culture which perceived the economical level not only as necessary, but also a sufficient explanation of cultural and ideological effects (Storey 1996:10). In other words, in addition to the traditional importance of class in ideology analysis, a Cultural Studies approach to ideology emphasises the important role of readers and their relation to gender and patriarchy, race and politics. Ideology is no longer seen as a unified set of static ideas imposed on the masses from above, but a dynamic process of constant negotiation between individual readers and texts with polysemic meanings.

2.5 Post-modern and contemporary notions of ideology and SA television in 2000 and beyond

Post-modern notions of ideology become increasingly abstract and the boundaries of definitions increasingly blurred. To understand culture in the post-modern age, it requires interpretation of social constructs, and not just an interpretation of the economy. Cultural Studies initiated such a move towards interpretation beyond mere economics. In turn, post-modern notions of ideology move a step beyond the Cultural Studies approach to ideology by asserting that the position of a reader is not only determined by gender, race, class and age, but also by, “a conglomeration of images and attitudes assimilated from the external environment”³⁸ (Hawkes 1996:1). Readers thus carry multiple ideas and attitudes that extend beyond their economic, political and ideological position. In a similar way, the meaning of cultural products includes economic, political and ideological social messages, but additionally embodies socially constructed codes, conventions, discourse and myths that support such ideological messages.

³⁸ The author borrows this phrase from David Hawkes (1996:1). He does not make a statement here, but instead ponders the artificiality of the interior self, and asks if a person’s identity is “nothing more than a conglomeration of images and attitudes assimilated from the external environment?” The author believes his idea of the subject constituted by “a conglomeration of images” is a good summation of post-modern ideas regarding ideology and identity.

Roland Barthes³⁹ (1972), French lecturer and critic, analyses everyday cultural artefacts and practices and shows how codes, conventions and myth are socially constructed to uphold certain economic, political and ideological messages. His text *Mythologies* (1972) was published in 1957, and consists of a collection of essays decoding a variety of contemporary French cultural phenomena and social life of the 1950s. Barthes reads the cultural aspects of social life from surface to depth, and shows that cultural phenomena is socially constructed as an illusory reality aimed at maintaining the status quo (Bignell 1997:17; Walker & Chaplin 1997:45, 134-135).

This socially constructed and illusory reality is what he calls myth. For Barthes (1972:109), “myth is a system of communication” or a type of speech. Barthes’s notion of myth is “not concerned with archetypes, untruths or Greek myths and legends, but how signs take on the value of the dominant value system – or ideology – of a particular society and make these values seem natural” (Lacey 1998:67). Myth is thus a representation of social reality that communicates social and political messages about the world, usually aiming to justify and naturalise the dominant position of the bourgeoisie (Barthes 1972:137). Myth represents social meanings as natural, acceptable and common sense (Bignell 1997:24).

Myths are stories emptied of history, and therefore a distortion of truth or reality. Myth is “not so much a nontruth as a socially constructed *truth* with an underlying ideological meaning” (Fourie 1996:162). Barthes (1972:121, 129) states that myth’s function is to distort reality rather than to make it disappear; myth “hides nothing and flaunts nothing: it distorts; myth is neither a lie nor a confession”. Instead, myth turns reality inside out, empties it of history and fills it with nature (Barthes 1972:142). An ideology is historical, but myth empties it and present it as universal and eternal (Barthes 1972:141).

If myth communicates political and social messages about society, another way to look at myth is as a servant to political ideologies. Myths are akin to the concept of ideology, but are not equivalent to it (Barker 2003:93). Myths are fictional narratives that

³⁹ The contribution of Barthes’ work ensured that the study of semiotics became a popular approach to cultural studies in the 1960s (O’Sullivan *et al* 1994:281). The semiotic side of Barthes concept of myth will be explored further in Chapter Three. Barthes could also be discussed together with a Cultural Studies approach to ideology in the previous section (2.3), but the author wishes to emphasise his notion of myth as a language emptied of “reality” and infused with new meaning. In this way it fits with post-modern ideas of the “spectral” nature of ideologies, the idea of the symbolic order, and myth itself as a kind of pastiche.

legitimise the dominant ideology, and aim to preserve the cultural unity of a society by convincing a diverse group of people that they are part of the same culture and national identity (Silverstone 1988:29; Price 1995:40). This ability to foster national identity is an important aspect of myth that contributes to an understanding of the SABC television channel brand identities.⁴⁰SABC television is an ideal platform and medium for the communication of myth that serves to strengthen national identity.

An example of such a myth communicated by the SABC (although socially constructed in the previous decade) is the myth of the African Renaissance. Former South African president Thabo Mbeki is credited with the addition of the African Renaissance rhetoric to national discourse after his influential “I am an African” speech (Mbeki 1996; Hadland & Rantao 1999:153-158). Mbeki (1998a) explains the concept of African Renaissance in the following manner:

The government is committed to the reconstruction and development of the country in order to provide a better life for all. This vision extends to making concrete contributions towards the transformation and rebirth of the African continent. This Renaissance - An African Renaissance, is about democracy, peace and stability, economic regeneration and improving the quality of life of our people in the region; through jobs, education and health. It is also about ensuring that the continent takes its rightful place on the world stage. But the region cannot achieve sustainable development unless it mobilises domestic and international resources. This requires practical policies to enable the region to build partnerships with other regions and the private sector to address issues of human resources development and the globalisation of the region's economies.

The concept of the African Renaissance is thus used by Mbeki as a metaphor for rebirth, reconstruction and regeneration of the African continent and its people. Speaking about the African Renaissance, Teer-Tomaselli (2001:127-128) notes how “the SABC has associated itself with the process of mythology-building”. SABC hosted a banquet at which Mbeki (then Deputy President) delivered his ‘African Renaissance’ address (Teer-Tomaselli 2001:128; Mbeki 1998b). The SABC therefore associated with the process of mythology-building by providing “a platform on which national leaders are able to articulate their vision of the African Renaissance” and through the total amount of local productions and thematic content of local programmes (Teer-Tomaselli 2001:128). The SABC therefore “consciously aligned itself with the process of African

⁴⁰ Barthes’ concept of myth and its support for dominant political ideologies is engaged further in Chapter Four.

Renaissance⁴¹ ... with the objective of creating a sense of national solidarity and oneness” (Teer-Tomaselli 2001:134).

Stating that the concept of the African Renaissance is a myth does not mean it does not exist, or that it is a false story. Instead it implies that the African Renaissance is a socially constructed representation, a depoliticised speech that creates an innocent metalanguage and distorts it into ‘nature’ or common sense (Barthes 1972:146-147). The myth of the African Renaissance is thus a symbolic concept that functions as a servant to Thabo Mbeki and his neo-liberal economic policies such as Black Economic Empowerment (BEE). It masks the goal to centralise power and secure wealth for the black petit bourgeoisie. Barthes (1972:146) notes that “[t]he bourgeoisie hides the fact that it is the bourgeoisie and thereby produces myth.”

The African Renaissance aspects of restructuring and rebirth are evident in the developments of South African television in the 2000s. The IBA Act of 1993 and the Broadcasting Act of 1999 in the previous decade set in motion the transformation of the SABC from a statutory body to a public company (Teer-Tomaselli 2001:118, Funde 2004:30). The legislation and the thinking behind it parallels “the world-wide trend towards deregulation, which has seen the opening up and liberalisation of public service enterprises” (Teer-Tomaselli 2001:120). The first decade of 2000 therefore marks the corporatisation of the national broadcaster (Ten Years ... 2003). On 1 October 2003 the SABC officially became SABC Ltd. after acquiring the status of a limited liability company (Ten Years ... 2003).

Wigston (2001:31) states that the Broadcasting Act of 1999 resulted in the corporatisation of the SABC. This corporatisation is a process that involved the implementation of the following four points; the governance of the SABC by a Broadcasting Charter that is monitored for compliance by ICASA (Independent Communications Authority of South Africa), the structuring of the SABC into the two public and commercial broadcasting groups, the subsidising of public broadcasting services by commercial services, and lastly, the establishment of the SABC as a limited liability company with the State as shareholder (Wigston 2001:31). The provision of a

⁴¹ After corporatisation of the SABC (2003) the organisation articulated its alignment with the African Renaissance even further when the Board of Directors (appointed in 2004) included the goal to “[e]nsure that the SABC plays a meaningful role in supporting the objectives of the African Renaissance and NEPAD” in its list of corporate goals (SABC Annual Report 2006:8-9).

public service with commercial feasibility is a difficult task. Teer-Tomaselli (1998) believes the purpose of public⁴² service broadcasting is

the provision of a universal service of excellent programming, while maintaining public legitimacy through an editorial independence from both the government of the day and rampant commercial interests. By 'universal' [she means] programming which covers a full range of genres, from information to education and entertainment, for the widest possible audience and covering the most extensive geographical spread.

The SABC is a broadcaster that has a public mandate although it operates as a commercial entity (Teer-Tomaselli 1998). The requirement to provide such a public service for each of the 11 official languages places additional strain on the SABC (Wigston 2001:27). The contradiction of public service broadcasting becomes apparent "where the pragmatism of limited financial means meets with the idealism of an all-encompassing mandate" (Teer-Tomaselli 1998). Nevertheless, the corporatisation of the SABC in 2003 meant that two of the three free-to-air television channels were repositioned and dedicated to public broadcasting, and one channel was repositioned as a commercial⁴³ service television channel (SABC Annual Report 2004:60, 68). SABC3 functions as an important source of revenue to the SABC and has to be completely self-sufficient. It also needs to fund SABC1 and SABC2 as public services. Therefore SABC3 has to be run cost effectively and in a manner that will maximise income (SABC Annual Report 2004:68).

The content and appearance of the television channels had to be consistent with the corporatisation and restructuring along the lines of public and commercial services, and channels required rebranding accordingly. United States specialist, Dr Susan Tyler Eastman (2003:71), was invited to consult on network programming at the SABC in 2001. One of the principle recommendations in her report was "to set aside [problems

⁴² Teer-Tomaselli (1998) states that public broadcasting is "premised on the understanding that the broadcasting spectrum is limited and belongs to the nation. The government, while it may act as the guardian of the nation-state, should be kept at arm's length from the day-to-day operation of the broadcaster. Broadcasting, in this view, is a public good belonging to the whole nation, not to be exploited for private or sectarian gain of either a monetary or ideological kind. Conceptually, the right place for the broadcaster is the public sphere".

⁴³ Wigston (2001:29) clarifies that commercial broadcasting "is defined as a service operated for profit. Being financed through advertising revenue, commercial broadcasters need to have a high success rate with their programming structure in order to deliver an audience to potential advertisers. This means that commercial stations are free to take advantage of new ideas, trends and developments in programming as they are purely market-driven".

concerning] languages temporarily and focus instead on a [distinct] image for each channel” (Eastman 2003:76). Eastman (2003:76) also suggested that the three channels should be reconstituted “as one all-news and political talk channel ..., one family oriented channel ..., and one young adult [or] teen-oriented channel” and suggested that this would “create three distinct images to promote to audiences that would cross over the language barriers”.

Accordingly, SABC1 was rebranded as the channel that reflects a youth-oriented identity which Orgeret (2004:156) describes as aspirant and youthful, “addressing mainly the young, black audiences”; SABC2 was rebranded as a channel with a family focus; and SABC3 was a channel aimed at “the more up-market English-speaking audiences” (Orgeret 2004:156).

The SABC Annual Report (2004:60) maintains that the rebranding of SABC1 took place after thorough market research and an “extensive process of understanding its viewers”. SABC1 realised that the previous *Simunye* brand image needed to be changed, thus they discarded the old payoff line, and replaced it with the *Ya mampela* slogan which means “the real thing” (De Jager 2003:1; Marutlulle 2005:66). The visual results of the new channel identity (see 4.3.1) indicate that the channel’s viewers⁴⁴ did not consent to “the media and state-driven project of nation building [in the sense of] a nauseating *Simunye* myth [that aims] to create a representation of a pluralistic society” (Della-Donne 2004:80).

The new brand positioning campaign was launched on 18 August 2003, and was aimed at the 16 to 34 year old viewers in the LSM 5-8 group⁴⁵ (De Jager 2003:1; Brands Bulls-Eye 2004). At the epicentre of SABC1’s market is the 25 year old, working class person, who is young at heart (Brands Bulls-Eye 2004). At this time SABC1 reached 89 percent of the population with a daily audience of 15 million viewers, and broadcast in the Nguni languages and English addressing mainly the

⁴⁴ The Brands Bulls-Eye/Blueprint (2004) indicates that the primary core of the SABC1 target market is viewers between the ages of 16-34, in the LSM 5-8 group.

⁴⁵ Klintworth (2004:27-28) explains that LSMs (Living Standards Measure) are a “categorization of consumers based on their sophistication of living standards”, where a LSM 1, for example, “will only have a paraffin stove and no water-borne sewage versus LSM 22 which has a number of personal computers and all that goes along with it” (Klintworth 2004:28). Also see All about SAARF (2010:[sp]).

young, black audiences (Development ... [sa]; SABC Annual Report 2004:60; Orgeret 2004:156).

The SABC2 brand was repositioned with the slogan *Feel at home* on 18 November 2002 (New look ... 2002). The new payoff line thus replaced the previous *Come Alive with Us* slogan. The SABC Annual Report (2004:61) describes the channel as one that celebrates “the family and nation building”, thereby creating a sense of belonging. The SABC Annual Report (2004:62) also states that SABC2 is the television channel “that truly reflects the multifaceted nature of the South African family”.

SABC2 surpassed SABC1 which had the largest transmission footprint in the preceding decade, covering 91 percent of the national population. Even though SABC2 has a larger footprint, it had a daily audience of nine million viewers in 2002 to 2003, thus smaller than the audience of SABC1 (Development ... [sa]; SABC Annual Report 2004:61). The channel broadcasts in Afrikaans, Sesotho, Setswana, Sepedi, xiTsonga, tshiVenda and English, while aiming to meet “the needs of the South African family nationally” (SABC Annual Report 2004:61).

SABC3, with its slogan *Much Better*, was the result of the rebranding of the restructured SABC channels in 2002 and 2003. Orgeret (2004:156) notes that SABC3 wanted to be more cosmopolitan in its reach for the more up-market English-speaking audiences. The channel focuses on entertainment and information that offers “the best fusion of local and international content [and] prides itself on reflecting a successful and stylish new South Africa” (SABC Annual Report 2004:68-69). The channel is a “contemporary adult channel targeting viewers in the LSM 8-10 group and the 25 to 49 age bracket” (SABC Annual Report 2004:69). SABC3 has an average daily audience of five and a half million viewers, and has the smallest transmission footprint covering only 77 percent of the national population in 2003 and 2004 (Development ... [sa]; SABC Annual Report 2004:68-69).

The establishment of the SABC channels according to the three distinct images that Eastman (2003:73) recommended is a characteristic of the postmodern notion of the ‘society of the spectacle’. Guy Debord (1994:12) believes this is a society based on the “social relationship between people that is mediated by images”. The images become the organising principle of social relationships between people. With regard to the

SABC channel brand identities, this means that the self-promotional images of the channels and the associated brand images promote certain values aimed at specific groups of people situated in specific geographic areas, and situated within specific cultures with their own conventions. The brand identities thus represent certain world views or specific disseminations of the social relationship between groups or types of people; it is “a world view transformed into an objective force” (Debord 1994:13). The image of youth resistance thus becomes the organising principle in the SABC1 *Ya Mampela* brand, the image of a national family the organising principle in the SABC2 *Feel at home* brand, and the image of upmarket class and style becomes the organising principle in the SABC3 *Much better* brand.

The changes of the brand identities according to three distinct images coincided with the corporatisation of the SABC during 2002 and 2003, and this phase of the rebranding of the SABC television channels was the first of two major changes in the SABC television channel brands, with the second phase occurring during 2007 and 2008. However, SABC2 and SABC3 also experienced stylistic changes in the middle of these two periods (in 2006 and 2005 respectively). The structure and nature of the channels, including the programmes and target audiences remained the same during this interim phase. Changes were visual, stylistic and superficial. The frequent changes in the visual brand identities of the SABC television channels are perhaps examples of the planned obsolescence and rapid rhythm of styling changes in postmodern society that Frederic Jameson (1983:124-125) observes.

The second phase of major changes in the SABC television channel brand identities that occurred during 2007 and 2009 follow the results of research conducted by the SAARF and its subsequent announcement of the findings regarding the attitudes of consumers. The SAARF attitudes segmentation model⁴⁶ divides people into groups in terms of their attitudes to various topics, thereby adding a third dimension to the traditional bi-dimensional demographic segmentation according to living standards and

⁴⁶ The SAARF website (All about SAARF 2010:[sp]) explains that the “SAARF Attitudes is the newest of the SAARF segmentation tools and divides people into 5 attitudinal groups. The attitude groups are based on people’s attitudes to various statements ranging from topics such as advertising to crime. Attitudes are hard to define. Whilst clearly related to values they are less deep seated and subject to change in much shorter time periods. Attitudes are also a manifestation of behaviour and the results of SAARF Attitudes confirm this. However whether attitudes precede behaviour or the converse is not always clear cut. They certainly help to define a person’s character and personality and can be extremely insightful in fleshing out a media user or target market”.

language (SAARF attitudes 2008; All about SAARF 2010:[sp]). According to these findings of the SAARF, the SABC released a new audience segmentation model (Introducing 2008:[sp]). The new audience segmentation model encouraged an endeavour to understand the SABC television audience in a wider, new manner. The added third dimension includes the attitudes of audiences on the premise that attitudes are predictive of behaviour, which are driven by needs and wants in order to fulfil values.

SABC viewers are divided into the following six segments according to their attitudes: nation builders; now generation; survivors; established; global citizens; and rooted (Introducing 2008:[sp]). Although the SABC audience segmentation model does not state which attitude groups are likely to watch each channel, an estimated observation can be made that SABC1 caters primarily for the now generation, and secondarily for the survivors and the rooted; SABC2 caters primarily for the nation builders, and secondarily for the survivors and the rooted; and SABC3 caters primarily for the global citizen, and secondarily for the established (see Appendix 3).

The new segmentation is a response to the needs of the various groups of viewers interviewed by the SAARF, and the re-structuring of the SABC channels and their brand identities⁴⁷ in 2007 and 2008 occurred along the lines of these attitudes. SABC1 was repositioned with a new brand identity and slogan, *Mzansi fo sho* (on 4 April 2007) while SABC2 retained its slogan *Feel at home*. The SABC2 brand identity included a new on-air look with a range of new idents. SABC3 was repositioned on 26 July 2007 with a new brand identity and on-air look, as well as a new tagline *Stay with 3*.

At this level ideology seems even less apparent and less imposed since it is no longer language and wealth, or culture and class that determine the position of people and their identities within the media environment. The language, wealth, race, culture, age and class of SABC viewers are referred to less directly and less often, but continue to be implied in the brand identities and audience segmentation of each channel. The underlying ideologies of the SABC brand identities thus become increasingly abstract and fragmented. The changes in the SABC television channel brand identities indicate that ideology becomes mere representation in the society of the spectacle. In other

⁴⁷ The brand identities of the SABC television channels and the changes therein during the 2000 and 2009 decade are explored in greater detail in Chapter Four.

words, ideology becomes a spectacle emptied of historical context, a spectral supplement to reality that becomes more real than the real, a simulacrum. The SABC television brands are indicative of Debord's (1994:24) notion that the "spectacle is *capital* accumulated to the point where it becomes image".

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter indicated that ideology discourse aims to highlight the political aspects of cultural forms such as television. The chapter explored key concepts in ideology theory alongside relevant examples in South African television, and also provided a brief historical overview of ideology theory and contextualised the SABC television channels within the history of South African television. The exploration of each decade of South Africa television shows the various manifestations of asymmetrical relations of power in South Africa.

Ideology as a critical discursive practice has become increasingly complex, since it is no longer only economics, wealth, class, race, gender and age that determines the position and identity of people within the media environment, but also their personal and individual aspects, their aspirations, beliefs, opinions, cultural influences and family influences, for example. Ideology thus becomes increasingly abstract. The "spectacle" or conglomeration of images creates maps of meaning with which the viewer can or cannot identify with, and ideology seems even less imposed this way since the viewer has a choice. The chapter highlights a tendency to increasingly prioritise the viewer rather than the producer, and also indicated that the SABC have progressively become a more democratic medium.

However, that does not mean that ideology is currently less involved than it was 30 years ago. On the contrary, ideology continues to underlie all cultural activities, but it does so in a more inconspicuous manner. Ideology appears emptied of historical context so that it becomes an image or representation. It is the representation that carries more weight than the aspect it represents, so that the image has more value than its material counterpart. It is in this vein that the capital of image and the image of capital is explored in the next chapter. It is argued that brands and their visual brand identities are spectral elements of the postmodern capitalist society, and that the

meanings of brands are very significant in terms of the cultural and economic importance given to brands in this postmodern society of the spectacle.

CHAPTER THREE

THE SEMIOTICS OF BRANDING AND CORPORATE IDENTITY

3.1 Introduction

Having concluded the discussion on the concept of ideology and ideological meanings in the context of South African television in the previous chapter, this chapter engages with the meanings of brands and the semiotics of brands and corporate identities. The semiotic theory employed in this chapter, and its interdisciplinary link with theory regarding branding, attempts to cast light on the encoding and decoding of social meanings and ideological messages in the SABC television channel brand identities under discussion. By determining the signs, codes and meanings suggested by a semiotic approach, semiotics becomes a useful tool to decipher how ideological meanings are created, circulated, propagated and reformulated in the branding process, and more specifically, the evolution of the SABC brand identities.

The appearance of brands on television range widely from branded products in advertisements, brands displayed in programmes, branded news broadcasts, branded television programmes and even branded television personalities, to name a few examples. Patrick Barwise, Andrea Dunham and Mark Ritson (2000:73) proclaim that “[w]e live in what anthropologist John Sherry has called ‘brandsapes’, places in which brands are an integral part of our everyday existence”. Products, services, experiences, events of communication, political leaders and wars are all being branded (Moore 2003:332). In fact, the “centrality and ubiquity of brands and branding is one of *the* defining characteristics of contemporary experience” (Moore 2003:332).

Barwise *et al* (2000:73) maintain that brands seem to be present everywhere, but find it strange, however, that their nature and function are rarely questioned. Simply stated, brands are nothing other than signs made up of various components. These components are signs themselves. The most prominent component of a brand is the logo, name, symbol or trademark; in other words, the mark denoting ownership (Pavitt 2000:21). A logo is a signifier, and all the qualities associated with the brand are signified by this logo or sign. All the components of a brand are encapsulated within or

summarised with a logo. It is argued that this semiotic quality of a brand assembles all aspects forming a brand as a whole (Bernsau 2006:[sp]).

Robert Moore (2003:332) bemoans the fact that semiotic analyses of brands are scarce and perceives a need within academic literature for “semiotically sophisticated and ethnographically rich understandings of brands”. Klaus Bernsau (2006:[sp]) also states that semiotics “is the only academic method to describe and research brand-phenomenon comprehensively. Semiotics is an interdisciplinary method that examines a brand with all relevant and subject-oriented tools and synthesises them through an abstract sign theory”. This chapter argues that the semiotic qualities of brands add to an understanding of the manner in which meaning is created, communicated and contested in the SABC channel brand identities.

This chapter addresses a variety of concepts and methods from the theory and practice of brands and branding, as well as the theory and practice of social semiotics and semiotic analysis. Social semiotics employs interdisciplinary analysis to explore the manner in which semiotic resources are used to produce and interpret communicative artefacts (Van Leeuwen 2005:xi, 1). Structural semiotics focuses on the form of the message, or the formal aspects, techniques and codes of the message, while social semiotic focus on the social or ideological meaning of messages (Fourie 1996:77). Social semiotics therefore “only comes into its own when it is applied to specific instances and specific problems, and it always requires immersing oneself not just in semiotic concepts and methods as such but also in some other field” (Van Leeuwen 2005:1).

This chapter thus deals with semiotic concepts and methods – not as the rules of a ‘pure’ semiotic theory or self-contained field to understand and create meaning, but rather as the tools or resources used to decipher meaning within “specific historical, cultural and institutional contexts” (Van Leeuwen 2005:3). This chapter borrows from structural and social semiotic theory to explain key concepts necessary for a social semiotic approach for an investigation of possible ideological meanings in the SABC television channel brands that follow in Chapter Four.

3.2. Semiotics

Semiotics is a fundamental approach to understanding media, and especially television texts. The way the term ‘semiotics’ is used today, however, is very different to what its original meaning implies. The original word “semeiotics” was coined by Hippocrates (460-377 BC) to define the branch of medicine that studies symptoms¹ (Danesi 2002:29). The formal study of signs was only introduced much later, by British philosopher John Locke (1632-1704), who introduced it in his *Essay concerning human understanding* (1690), “anticipating that it would allow philosophers to understand the interconnection between representation and knowledge” (Danesi 2002:30).

The modern use of the term ‘semiotics’ can be defined as the study of signs and sign systems. Semiotics is “concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign” (Eco 1976:7) or “anything which ‘stands for’ something else ... not in isolation but as part of semiotic ‘sign-systems’ ... ” (Chandler 2002:2). Semiotics is thus a tool for the study of communication, and studies the way signs, such as words, images, traffic signs, flowers, and music communicate, and also studies the rules that govern the use of such signs (Seiter 1992:31). In this sense, semiotics “first asks *how* meaning is created, rather than *what* the meaning is” (Seiter 1992:31). This definition of semiotics has its origins in the work of Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) and American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), who without knowing about the other’s work, founded the study of signs simultaneously (Lacey 1998:56).

Saussure (1983:15) defined this field of study as *semiology*. For Saussure (1983:15), it was possible to have a science that studies the role played by signs as part of life, which he called “semiology” (from the Greek *sēmeîon*, ‘sign’). To Peirce this study field comprised the “formal doctrine of signs”,² and “was closely related to logic” (Peirce cited by Chandler 2002:6). Chandler (2002:6) notes that on occasion, Saussure’s term ‘semiology’ is used to refer to the Saussurean tradition while ‘semiotics’ (with the added ‘s’) refers to the Peircean tradition, although the term ‘semiotics’ now describes the entire field and is thus an all-inclusive term.

¹ Danesi (2002:29) further explains that a symptom is “in effect, a semeion: ‘a mark or sign’ that stands for something other than itself.

² Peirce (1931-58, 2, 227) cited by Chandler (2002:6).

Saussure's *Course in general linguistics*³ was published in 1916, three years after his death. The focus of Saussure's work was on the linguistic sign, and he believed that "language is made up of signs (like words) which communicate meanings, and that all kinds of other things which communicate meanings could potentially be studied in the same way as linguistic signs" (Bignell 1997:5). Photographs, art works, designs, television programmes and channel brands, for example, all communicate meaning and can be studied through semiology. For Saussure (1983:68), "linguistics serves as a model for the whole of semiology, even though languages represent only one type of semiological system".

In contrast to Saussure's emphasis on *structure*, Peirce emphasised 'semiosis' as a dynamic *process* of dialogical thought (Chandler 2002:34). For Peirce, semiotics was an abstract explication of the formal structure of intelligence, or the philosophy of mind (Sebeok 1986:674). Peirce developed intricate logical taxonomies of types of signs, but it is his distinctions between symbolic, iconic and indexical signs⁴ that are particularly useful in the semiotic analysis of images or non-verbal signs (Bignell 1997:14).

Saussure (1983:15) envisioned that semiology would become a science "which studies the role of signs as part of social life", but neglected the study of the role of signs in society in his own work. This proposal was pursued by the structuralist Roland Barthes, who popularised and extended the study of semiotics in the 1960s when it became a major approach to cultural studies (O'Sullivan *et al* 1994:281). In *Mythologies* (1972), Barthes draws attention to the value of studying media, everyday objects and popular culture with the theoretical tools of semiotics (Danesi 2002:33). O'Sullivan *et al* (1994:281-282) state that it was owing to the success of semiotics as an analytic tool in Barthes work that it "has become associated largely with the increasingly serious study of various forms of popular culture". Before the work of Barthes, popular culture had been a much neglected field in academic study. It was his emphasis on "the social and ideological relationship of and between signs and codes" (Fourie 1996:33) that was especially significant in the use of semiotics to study media and popular culture.

The social and ideological relationship between signs and codes in popular culture evolves further in *social semiotics* with its importance placed on the reader. Chandler

³ This collection of Saussure's work was assembled from lecture notes taken by his pupils, and was put together by his colleagues (Saussure 1983:xii).

⁴ Symbolic, iconic and indexical signs are discussed later in this chapter (see 3.6).

(2002:12) notes how “[c]ontemporary *social* semiotics has moved beyond the structuralist focus on signifying systems as languages, seeking to explore the use of signs in specific social institutions”. In other words, the shift in focus in semiotics has moved from *structure* to the *process* of semiosis and the “role of the reader in realising or producing meanings out of textual resources in an interactive way” (O’Sullivan *et al* 1994:282).

The semiotic theory applied in this chapter therefore examines the structures and codes of brands. In addition to conventional semiotic theory which stresses system and product, *social* semiotic theory regards semiotic systems, such as SABC television channel brands, to be communicative processes that exist in concrete social contexts and consider such systems to be part of social and political thought. The shift in semiotic theory regards “participants in semiotic activity as connected and interacting in a variety of ways in concrete social contexts” (Hodge & Kress 1988:2). Those who participate in the semiotic systems of the SABC channel brand identities interact, connect, and communicate within specific social contexts, which in turn influences the way meanings are created, interpreted and re-created.

A similar shift in focus towards the reader can be observed in brand theory and the process of branding, resulting in a focus on the consumer and brand image. The role of consumers and their interactive relationship with brands and their meanings has become a central factor in the process of branding. As an important part of popular culture and the study thereof initiated by Barthes, this chapter explores brands and branding as a specific platform for the creation and consumption of meaning in society. The following section explores the increased focus and awareness of the importance of the consumer in branding processes.

3.3 The origin and evolution of branding practices

The word *brand* derives from the Old Norse word *brandr*, which means ‘to burn’ (Blackett 2004:[sp]), and refers to “the practice of indelibly marking or stamping property, usually with a hot iron” (Pavitt 2000:21), mainly for identification purposes (Danesi 2002:186). Branding has been around for thousands of years, with livestock being branded by the Egyptians as early as 2000 BC (Danesi 2002:186). Artefacts such as medieval swords, ancient Chinese pottery, furniture and tapestries were

marked with identifiable symbols to denote the origin and quality of products (Danesi 2002:186; Blackett 2004:[sp]). Symbols and characteristic marks of trades people and guild members also appeared outside shops, for example the red and white striped pole of the barbershop (Danesi 2002:186).

Branding as it is known today emerged during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with the industrial revolution propelling improvements in manufacturing (Blackett 2004:[sp]). With the advent of the factory it became necessary to distinguish between mass-produced products that seemed very similar (Klein 2000:6). A key strategy for product differentiation was image-based naming, since products such as soap, sugar and flour, for example, were previously sold from bulk containers in neighbourhood stores; “[t]he first modern-day brand names were thus invented” (Danesi 2002:186). Naomi Klein (2000:6) notes that “[c]ompetitive branding became a necessity [and] image-based difference had to be manufactured along with the product”; the brand identity or logo on packaged goods and advertisements thus replaced the local shopkeeper as an advocate of products.

It was the post-World War II era that saw the real explosion in the use of brands (Blackett 2004:[sp]) with a growing first world consumer society, owing to a higher quality of life after the War. The post-war period witnessed an economic boom with increases in personal income and the growth of the suburban middle class (Low & Fullerton 1994:181). During this time, television advertising had a big impact on the importance of brands and brand advertising in America (Low & Fullerton 1994:181). Danesi (2002:187) notes that by “the early 1950s, it became obvious that branding was not just a simple strategy for product differentiation, but the very semiotic fuel that propelled corporate identity and product recognisability”.

During that period, the ephemeral quality of brands emerged. Corporations searched for their ‘corporate consciousness’ or ‘brand essence’, which “gradually took the agencies away from individual products and their attributes and toward a psychological/anthropological examination of what brands mean to the culture and to people’s lives” (Klein 2000:7). Tony Meenaghan (1995:23) similarly observes increased awareness towards the symbolic associations and expressiveness of products and brands rather than functional benefits. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, the physical product remained the central differential, rather than the brand, but consumer

products were sold based on emotional appeals to the needs for security and conformity (Maio 1999:12). This was an important shift which resulted in the belief that although corporations manufacture products, consumers actually buy brands (Klein 2000:7).

David Norton (2003:23) explains how the 1980s and 1990s contributed to millennial brand trends, with an increased desire for “connection, community, and purpose”. He describes the 1980s as a time of “unabashed conspicuous consumption”⁵ that paralleled the focus on brands and brand image (Norton 2003:19). Klein (2000:7) describes the 1980s as “brand equity mania”, when the corporation behind the brand became the brand. For Norton (2003:19), the 1980s formed the historical basis that contributed to the revolution in branding that has taken place in the 1980s, 1990s and the 2000s (Figure 3).

The evolution in consumer demand

	Millennial	Meaningful experiences	Brand truth	Meaningful brand experiences
	'90s	Experiences	Brand experience	Experiential customer encounters
'80s	Products & services	Brand image	Products & services with personality	
	Evolution in consumer demand	Successful brand strategies	Design solutions	

Design must evolve to meet consumer demand. The millennial decade will build upon the best practices of the previous decades. Brand image still matters. Brand experience is critical. But the most successful companies will produce meaningful brand experiences.

Figure 3: The evolution in brand trends since the 1980s.
(Norton 2003:21.)

There is a similarity between Norton’s model and the evolution of the SABC television channel brands. The 1980s witnessed a major expansion of the SABC television network products or services. By 1985, SABC television channels consisted of TV1, TV2, TV3 and TV4. TV1 and TV4 broadcast in Afrikaans and English, while TV2 and TV3 broadcast in the Nguni languages and the Sesotho languages respectively (Mersham 1998:212; Wigston 2001:12). As previously noted, TV2 and TV3 “showed ‘black’ news, which differed considerably from the English and Afrikaans versions”

⁵ Meenaghan (1995:25-26) notes that it “has long been recognized that products have meanings for consumers beyond providing mere functional utility”. He notes, for example that “[s]ymbolic consumption was recognized by Veblen (1899) in his Theory of the Leisure Class and termed conspicuous consumption”. Meenaghan (1995:25-26) also includes Karl Marx’s metaphor of “the language of commodities” in which “the linen conveys its thoughts” and Barthes’ notion of objects that exists above the “utilitarian or functional aspects of objects”.

(Orgeret 2004:150). The brand image that this expansion created was that TV2 and TV3 were 'black' television channels while TV1 and TV4 were so-called 'white' channels.

During the 1990s, the ephemeral brand became stronger than the physical aspect of its products and services. The consumer focus changed in the 1990s from the physical, or the accumulation of things, to the accumulation of the abstract, or experiences (Norton 2003:21). This is also evident in the changes of the SABC television channels, which became the platforms for the experience of unity in diversity during the 1990s. The changes in 1996, and the consequential brand identities of the channels, indicate a move towards 'higher values' with a focus on democracy and non-racist standards. The slogans of the channels launched in 1996, namely *Simunye, We are One* (SABC1), *Come Alive with Us* (SABC2) and *Quality Shows* (SABC3) indicate an increased focus on brand experiences and experiential viewer encounters.

Together with an increase in consumer goods, a decrease in cultural capital⁶ caused a great demand for meaningful experiences (Norton 2003:20). Elsie Maio (1999:11) explains that "the Western consumer has begun to expect more than high quality products and services from corporations" and the public started demanding that corporations demonstrate higher values. Klein (2000) describes how anti-corporate imagery started emerging with an increase in activists targeting deceitful and socially irresponsible corporations and brands.⁷ The anti-corporate movement embodied "culture-jammed logos [in] the guerrilla-warfare stylings" (Klein 2000:449) that served as counter-messages. These counter-messages uncovered "not an opposite meaning but the deeper truth hiding beneath the layers of advertising euphemisms" (Klein 2000:281-282). The culture jammers, as such activists became known, started attacking the passive culture of spectatorship and the ethos of mainstream capitalist society (Klein 2000:283).

⁶ Norton (2003:20) refers to Pierre Bourdieu's seminal use of the term *cultural capital* that is used in a similar way to the concept of economic capital. Bourdieu (1984) asserts that cultural capital is the cultural, educational, and intellectual assets, the social habits and knowledge inherited from the family and educational institutions. Norton (2003:20) states that cultural capital "is produced by the "softer" aspects of life: nature, art, family, faith, community, and school". For Norton (2003:20) these resources are "literally priceless, from which we draw distinctions regarding our purpose in life" and notes that the 1990s witnessed a demand for meaningful experiences that are usually stored up as cultural capital.

⁷ Klein (2000) exposed how big brands such as Nike and McDonalds had negative effects on the health and well-being of individuals and communities.

The change of SABC1 from *Simunye* to *Ya Mampela* indicates how this culture jamming aesthetic or anti-corporate imagery was taken up by corporate marketing (Klein 2000:448; Spark 2004:65-66). Punk styles, cutting, pasting and graffiti are often used in contemporary marketing strategies, which for Klein (2000:448) indicates a fast corporate co-option. The re-branding of SABC1 indicates a move towards brand truth, since the channel's antagonistic viewers believed the *Simunye* brand identity "held out fictive opportunities of transcendence through appreciating and identifying with a fantasy of 'oneness'" (Lewis 2000:163-164). The adoption of imagery associated with anti-corporate movements by the *Ya Mampela* brand identity of SABC1 in 2003 indicates how brand trends have been incorporated in design strategies to create meaningful experiences for its stakeholders (Spark 2004b:66).

The activism in the 1990s resulted in a new consumer demand for the 2000s. Norton (2003:23) indicates that this is the need for brand truth and meaningful brand experiences. Consumers increasingly demand that organisations must be socially responsible and stand for something 'true'. Norton (2003:23) states that in "a market in which cynicism about corporate intentions runs so deep, it is absolutely necessary that companies learn to stand for something more than 'more' [and] produce not just economic capital, but cultural capital, as well". Consumers desire sincere and socially accountable organisations that facilitate chances to meaningfully connect with their family and community (Norton 2003:23). Maio (1999:13) finds a solution in soul branding:

soul brands are not only communicating, but are really trying to *live* by, a set of higher ideals, including a sense of social responsibility. They express strong, uplifting emotions; they embrace the notion of being a global citizen; they advocate and cherish human values through their actions.

She sees soul branding as the "result of deep psychological and emotional needs that have been evolving for decades" (Maio 1992:14), and equates these needs to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow 1943). Psychologist Abraham Maslow proposed a topographical model of human needs suggesting that the lower or basic needs (such as food and shelter) must be met before the higher needs (such as love) can be met. At the highest level of the human needs is self-actualisation, that is, the need to become the best a person can be (Maslow 1943:382).

The historical evolution in branding indicates a move upwards in the hierarchy of needs, from functional to emotional and ultimately, inspirational branding (Maio 1999:12). Whereas this section explored the evolution of branding practices in general, it is also useful to explore the historical thread of specific brands. Mary Jo Hatch and James Rubin (2006:40) suggest that a hermeneutic approach to branding permits an explanation of the ways in which the meaning of a brand changes over time, thereby providing a brand with a historical dimension. They maintain that the meaning of a brand results from “collective interpretations by multiple stakeholders over numerous but particular moments” (Hatch & Rubin 2006:41). A historical dimension of a brand traces the meaning from its early stages to its present manifestation. They state that “even through remarkable changes in what a brand signifies, or the stakeholders it engages, a brand often retains a trace of its original intention” (Hatch & Rubin 2006:41).

The meaning of SABC1 branding, for example, has changed significantly over the last few years. The *Ya Mampela* brand identity (2003) was quite different from the *Simunye, We are One* brand identity (1996), and both of these are different from the *Mzansi fo sho* brand identity (2007). The changes in meaning of the SABC1 brand can perhaps be explained with a metaphor of a pendulum, swaying first to the right with the *Simunye* identity (1996), then swinging to the left with the *Ya Mampela* identity (2003), and finding a (temporary) position in the middle with the current *Mzansi fo sho* brand identity (2007). Throughout all the changes, the SABC1 brand retains its association as ‘the people’s channel’. Hatch and Rubin (2006:55) state that brands are mutable because they are constructed and indeterminate, and they have value because they symbolically create and communicate meaning and invoke various interpretations across time and place.

The brand identities of the SABC television channels are mutable and the changes in them and their meanings during the last decade illustrate a shift towards higher values and inspirational branding. The national broadcaster attempts to create distinct and meaningful brand experiences for viewers, in a move that is increasingly people oriented and aligned with a public service mandate striving for “citizen empowerment” (SABC Annual Report 2007:14). Whereas this section explored the origin of the term ‘brand’ and the evolution in branding, the next section examines the nature and function of brands, as well as the terminology and key concepts of branding.

3.4 Key concepts of branding and corporate identity

It is a common misconception that a brand is a name, logo, symbol or trademark. Pavitt (2000:21) explains that these aspects are indeed “the most recognizable feature[s] of a brand”, but are not *the* brand. In the same way, the word *branding* is often used interchangeably with *advertising*. Klein (2000:5) explains that the *brand* is “the core meaning of the modern corporation”, whereas *advertising* is “only one part of branding’s grand plan”, or only one vehicle to convey the core meaning of a corporation to the world.

Similarly, Peter Kim (1990:65), and John Balmer and Edmund Gray (2003) note that the use of terms such as product, brand name, product brands, corporate brands, brand identity, brand image, brand identity, corporate image, corporate identity and brand personality are “worn, limited and confused [and are used] carelessly and even interchangeably, thereby losing nuances in meanings that differentiate these terms and give each its original precision”. With each term, the producer/brand proprietor/sender and the consumer/stake-holder/receiver are situated in a distinct position within the communicative process or semiosis of branding. It is therefore useful to explore the meanings of these terms to avoid confusion in understanding them. Distinctions between these terms are also useful to establish the process of semiosis in the branding process.

The first ambiguity exists between the terms *product* and *brand* since product brands are most often the central subject in literature on branding. Peter Kim (1990:65) provides a useful distinction between these two terms; a *product* is “a physical thing that is made in the factory, or a service that is made available. It exists in the external, temporal world. ... A product can usually be seen, touched, eaten, experienced, used; it can be objectively defined, measured, assessed”. Kim’s definition therefore indicates that the product can be defined as the material and corporeal component.

A *brand*, on the other hand, is the non-material or mental component. Kim (1990:65) states that a brand “has no tangible, physical, or functional properties. It is a mental translation, an abstraction of that object or service. It is conceptual and abstract, like an idea, and is present only in the mind of the person seeing it, and does therefore not exist independently. Although a brand exists in the imagination of the consumer, it is

“as real as the product, for it is as real in its consequences” (Kim 1990:65). Brands acquire their value and meaning through the consumer’s interaction with “fragments of experiences, thoughts, feelings, associations, and images provided by the beholder of the brand” (Kim 1990:65).

The brand identity of SABC2 can be used as an example to distinguish between *product* and *brand*. The *product* or service consists of television programmes considered appropriate for family viewing. The *brand* on the other hand, is the aura of familial intimacy and unity. The product “is seen as providing core functional benefits while the *brand* is responsible for creating the magnetic human-like aura around the actual product” (Meenaghan 1995:24). In this way, the *brand* is a component of *image* received in the mind of the receiver, while the *product* or service is a component of *identity* sent by a company.⁸

Brands have also become two-faceted entities viewed from the respective positions of base and superstructure in Marxist theory. From the base or *economic perspective*, brands are economic events or economic entities that serve a strategic purpose to add value to an organisation. Jeremy Sampson (2004:11) notes that brands emerged as essential ingredients of twenty-first century business in the last decade, and that company owners and brand proprietors increasingly recognise and treat brands as “economic entities, with immense potential for wealth creation”. Coca Cola⁹ is an example of the value-creating capacity of its brand, with the brand becoming *the* “most valuable asset a company can own” (Sampson 2004:11). While brands are valuable economic assets, they also have the potential and capacity to be social and political instruments (Sampson 2004:11).

The brand’s potential to be a social and political instrument is viewed from the superstructure or *cultural perspective*. From the cultural point of view, brands are social events with the capacity to become social signals and providers of identity. For Tony Meenaghan (1995:26), brands are “social signals ... with congruity between brand and

⁸ The *product* can be equated with Saussure’s “signifier” and the *brand* with its “signified”.

⁹ Melin (2002:109) states that Coca-Cola is perhaps the world’s strongest brand with a brand value of 700 billion Swedish crowns (approximately R712 billion or US \$97.2 billion), and corresponds to 60 percent of the company’s value on the stock exchange. Similarly, companies such as BMW, Nike and Apple “are even more dependent on their brands, which actually represent more than 75 percent of the company’s total stock-market value” (Melin 2002:109).

user self-image”. The brand is endorsed as “a sign of self”, becoming an indicator to others of personal status, aspiration or personal values (Pavitt 2000:44). Judie Lannon and Peter Cooper (1983:205) express similarly that

[b]rands are used as a sort of language. Brands tell you a great deal about who you are, where you are in life, what you are and where you are going. Brand choices are as much a part of ourselves as the way we speak, the words we use, our dialect, dress, gestures and language. Brands are part of ourselves and we are part of our brands.

However, it is when consumers or viewers cannot identify with the inherent qualities of a brand that they show resistance towards brands. It is then that brands, for the consumer, become a political weapon. Klein (2000) describes how brands have become a tool in the hands of anti-corporate activists campaigning against corporations that choose profit over conscience. Nike, for example, has been used by members of society to expose and transform unjust labour practices (see Klein 2000:365-396). In this case, brands as political tools are viewed from the consumer-end.

From the sender-end, brands can also be used as political weapons. Lewis (2000:163) perceives the brand identity of SABC1 – with its catch-phrase *Simunye, We are One* – as a political tool that serves the strategy to ensure smooth transition into a new democracy. Through its unifying slogan and cheerful imagery of racially diverse presenters, the SABC1 *Simunye* brand propagates the post-apartheid ideology of the rainbow nation and its entreaty to South Africans to be united despite their differences (Lewis 2000:163).

From the two notions of brands above, firstly that brands are economic events, and secondly that brands are social events and providers of identity, it becomes clear that brands have different meanings. The meaning of brands as economic events serving a specific strategic purpose can be viewed from the sender-end, while the meaning of brands as providers of identity can be viewed from the consumer-end. From the consumer-end, for example, a brand can function as “an information carrier, a guarantee, a catalyst and an image creator [and] together, these qualities in a brand help to create value for the consumer” (Melin 2002:110). Balmer and Gray (2003:973-974) provide five valuable definitions, functions or meanings of brands based on the two perspectives of sender- and consumer-end.

Firstly, brands are marks indicating ownership. Traditionally viewed from the sender-end of the equation, a brand in its simplest sense “denotes a name, logotype or trademark denoting ownership” (Balmer & Gray 2003:973). The brands explored in the following chapter are all owned by the SABC. The word SABC is used in a uniform font within all the logos of the SABC television channels, and as such, indicates the ownership of the SABC.¹⁰ While the television channels compete for audience share and advertising revenue, the endorsement of the SABC name on all channels provides a collective corporate consciousness and unified corporate identity.

Secondly, from the sender-end of the equation, brands are known as image-building devices utilised in corporate image building (Balmer & Gray 2003:973). In this way organisations use brands to evoke the conviviality of their brand identity. SABC1, for example, uses their *Ya mampela* brand to suggest an image of youth television and social realism. The brand image this channel aims to evoke is that of brave, responsible youthfulness and social realism that serves as an inspiration and guiding light to social action for youthful people (SABC commissioning briefs 2005:5-6).

SABC2 uses their brand to advocate an image of family television and good moral values regarding unity and Nation Building (SABC commissioning briefs 2005:7-8). The brand image the SABC2 aims to evoke is a sense of belonging within the domestic family, national family and continental or African family. SABC3 uses their brand to inspire an image of upmarket cosmopolitan television and progressive sophistication (SABC channel statements 2006:7-9). This brand aims to evoke an image of aspirations, progression, achievement and national consciousness, situated within a world view. From the sender-end, each channel uses its brand to create a brand image in the mind of the consumer – which would ideally be consistent with the channel identity.

Thirdly, brands are symbols associated with key values. In this sense, brands from the sender-end are seen to represent the inbuilt values of the corporation (Balmer & Gray 2003:973). According to the SABC channel statements (2006) the television channel brands encapsulate the following additional values, SABC1: entertaining social realism, reality, honesty, social action and dialogue, courage, freedom, truth and youth culture;

¹⁰ This is part of what Olins (1989:78) calls *endorsed* corporate identity, where “an organisation has a group of activities/companies which it endorses with the group name and identity”.

SABC2: family values, responsibility, South African identity, African identity, moral values, personal ethics, nation building, pride, tradition, history, culture, unity, acceptance and solidarity; SABC3: sophistication, style, upmarket entertainment and cosmopolitanism.

The fourth definition of brands, this time from the 'consumer-end' of the equation, defines brands as means by which consumers construct individual identities (Balmer & Gray 2003:973-974). In this sense, the manner in which consumers interact with brands defines "who they are, aspire to be and/or wish to be seen" (Balmer & Gray 2003:973). A SABC1 viewer may wish to be seen as "a people's person, friendly and caring and with lots of vibe [a person who] hasn't forgotten her roots" (SABC channel statements 2006:1), a popular, responsible, truthful, socially active, and socially aware, optimistic, youthful, proudly African, courageous, 'hip', person. A SABC2 viewer may wish to be seen as a person with good moral, ethical and family values, a person engaged in nation building, serving the community, proudly South African, a person who values tradition, history and culture, African unity and solidarity, support systems, and a person who values "caring, sharing, looking out for each other, love, respect, and acceptance of who we are as people" (SABC channel statements 2006:5). The SABC3 viewer may wish to be seen as an upmarket, urban achiever, progressive and sophisticated, a person with a world view who nevertheless possesses a uniquely South African identity (SABC channel statements 2006:7-8).

The fifth definition of brands, again from the consumer-end of equation, defines brands as a conduit by which pleasurable experiences may be consumed (Balmer & Gray 2003:974). Accordingly, the SABC1 brand can be the conduit by which the pleasurable experience of youth entertainment, popular and 'cool' television can be experienced. The SABC2 brand can be the conduit by which pleasurable family, cultural and community entertainment can be experienced. The SABC3 brand can be the means by which stylish, intelligent and sophisticated entertainment ('high culture') can be experienced.

Focusing on the communicative qualities of brands, and the meanings of brands viewed from both the sender- and consumer-end, it also becomes necessary to distinguish between the terms brand *image* and brand *identity*. Meenaghan (1995:24) provides a useful distinction between the terms *image* and *identity*, *identity* means "the

sum of all the ways a company chooses to identify itself to all its publics”. Identity is the element that a company can control and the element that a company will focus on in relation to the management of the image development process; “[i]n short, identity is sent” (Meenaghan 1995:24). *Image*, on the other hand, “is formed in the mind of the receiver”; it is the perception of the company that the receivers hold in their mind: image is received or perceived (Meenaghan 1995:24).

Expanding on the definition above, *identity* is also considered to be the company’s expression of “what the brand stands for, what gives it meaning and what makes it unique” (Melin 2002:118-119). Brand identity¹¹ “is the brand’s unique fingerprint which makes it one of a kind [... and can be] compared to a genetic code, an inbuilt plan for the development of the brand” (Melin 2002:120). Brand identity is also a strategy of expression or communication influenced by, among other things, choice of *name*; its historical, geographical, cultural, social and ideological *origins*; self-image or *personality*; *use* (when, where, why and by who will the brand be used); and *distribution* (the control of the manner in which products or services are distributed) (Melin 2002:120-121). Melin’s (2002) description of identity indicates that building a strong brand identity is a strategy of communication that involves a holistic approach similar to the approach propagated by Wally Olins (1989).

Olins’ holistic approach requires that all organisational activities must affirm and express the corporate identity, and it is thus the responsibility of the organisation’s leaders and employees, and not just its advertising agents, designers and public relations managers (Olins 1989:7, 33). Everything a company “makes or sells, everything that it builds, everywhere that it operates, everything that it says or writes or displays, should build up the corporate spirit, the corporate identity” (Olins 1989:25). Olins (1989:7) states that a corporate *identity* is concerned with four major areas of activity.¹²

The *products* that the company makes or sells must project its standards and its values. The *buildings* in which it makes things and trades, its offices, factories, and showpieces – their location, how they

¹¹ For Abratt (1989:68) corporate identity is an assembly of cues “... by which an audience can recognise the company and distinguish it from others and which can be used to represent or symbolise the company”.

¹² These four major areas are similar to what is often referred to as the “Marketing Mix” or the “Four Ps of the Marketing Mix”, a term originally coined by Neil Borden in 1964. The four Ps are *Product*, *Price*, *Place* (or distribution) and *Promotion* (McDowell & Batten 2005:13).

are furnished and maintained – are all manifestations of identity. The corporation’s *communication material*, from its advertising to its instruction manuals, must have a consistent quality and character that accurately and honestly reflect the whole organization and its aims. All these are palpable, they are visible; they are designed – and that is why design is a significant component in the identity mix. A further component, which is just as significant although it is not visible, is how the organization *behaves*: to its own staff and to everybody with whom it comes into contact, including customers, suppliers and its host communities. This is especially true in service industries that have no tangible products. Here, too, consistency in attitude, action and style underlines the corporation’s identity.

Expressing corporate *identity* holistically can be very challenging. In this sense, brand identity is sent, controlled and created, and involves the action of *encoding*¹³ the company with the sum of its own perceptions of all its qualities expressed through all its activities. Companies cannot create their brand image as such, but a company can influence the reception of brand image by encoding its brand identity.

Brand image, on the other hand, involves the action of *decoding* on the part of the receiver or consumer. For Pavitt (2000:21), brand image or brand value results from “the dialogue that takes place between producer or brand owner and the consumer or user ... and the reception of that message by the consumer”. Brand image is the combination of beliefs, knowledge, associations, feelings, ideals and reflections that exist as a mental concept in the receiver or consumer’s mind, and is associated with the company as a result of the company’s entire activities, including the communication of its brand identity (Aaker 1992:109-110; Meenaghan 1995:23-27). The brand image is thus “the associated symbolic values, personality or character of a brand in the mind of the consumer” (Meenaghan 1995:27) and is more intangible, abstract and ephemeral than the brand identity.

The term *branding* involves both creating a brand identity and its involvement with the reception of brand image. Usually viewed from sender-end of the communication equation, *branding* “is principally the process of attaching a name and a reputation to something or someone” (Pavitt 2000:21). Schultz and Hatch (2002:142) provide two definitions of branding from the sender-end. Firstly, they state that “corporate branding

¹³ Hall’s notion of encoding and decoding (1990 [1980]) in television texts has been mentioned in the previous chapter (section 2.3). Branding as a cultural text displays the same principle of encoding on the part of the producer of the text, and decoding on the part of the interpreter (viewer/reader) of the text.

means putting the company name on all the products and services”, and secondly that branding means expressing “core values creatively and emotionally, for instance, by inspiring a distinctive look and feel that pervades the whole company” and all areas of company activity.

Schultz and Hatch (2002:142) provide a third definition leaning more towards the consumer-end, by stating that branding is an “ambition to tap into the core values of the organization and reflect about how they are being expressed and interpreted among all stakeholders”. The stakeholder or receiver is thus included. Leslie De Chernatony (1989:10) states that the “consumer is an active participant in the branding process ... and thus branding is a consequence of both the organisations input and the resulting consumer perception (i.e. the output)”. It could then be argued that branding is the *process* of the construction of brand identity and brand image, and a process of communication or negotiation between producer and consumer that includes both brand proprietor and stakeholder as active participants in this process.

The *brand name* plays a pivotal role in the communication process of branding; as such, “[n]aming is a subset of branding” (Grimaldi 2003:[sp]). A brand name consists of any combination of sounds or phonemes and should ideally be “unique enough as to identify a product or service without ambiguity” (Grimaldi 2003:[sp]). The name can be that of a company or product owner, service provider, the name of a particular product or product range, or the name of a particular service, or both (Pavitt 2000:21). The brand names of the SABC are an example of a family of branded products and services, all owned by the same company (Pavitt 2000:21). SABC News, SABC Sport, SABC Education, SABC1, SABC2, SABC3 and SABC Africa (before its dissolution), for example, “share certain features of their brand image, while still possessing a distinctive character or potential market” (Pavitt 2000:21). This is an example of what has been termed ‘brand DNA’, where “each brand depends upon the image of the parent-brand” (in this case the parent SABC brand), despite their individual character (Pavitt 2000:21).

The function of a *brand name* involves more than just identifying a product or service. Danesi (2002:185-186) states that brand names at an informative, practical level have

a denotative¹⁴ function that allow the consumer to determine the origin or identity of a particular product or service, although at the connotative level, the name of the product can provoke an image beyond the initial function of identification. Therefore the brand name can further, or extend, denotative meaning into what is known as connotation¹⁵ (Danesi 2002:186).

The pictorial counterpart of a brand name, the *logo*,¹⁶ is “designed to generate the same kinds of connotative signification systems for a product [or service] through the visual modality” (Danesi 2002:187). In a manner similar to the brand name, the *logo* becomes a signifier that can signify all the values and meanings attached to a brand. Schultz and Hatch (2002:143) maintain that a logo is a symbol that “can stand for any and all the meanings that stakeholders give to a company”. They believe that logos are powerful symbols that capture the meanings stakeholders associate with the brand.

For Schultz and Hatch (2002:143), these symbols react on one’s emotions, imagination and intellect, and are better for producing involvement and commitment, but symbols or logos can signify many things and are arbitrary (Schultz & Hatch 2002:143). A symbol functions by convention. Peirce (1931-58, 2.249) states that a symbol is a sign which points to the denoted object by virtue of a ‘law’ (generally similar ideas) which then function to cause the interpretation of the symbol as referencing the object. It is therefore important for the proprietor to actively create the association of ideas associated with a brand. Olins (1989:25) states that symbols of loyalty (such as flags, rituals, and names for example) have to be manufactured by an organisation to create loyalty. Olins (1989:29) also contends that the identity should be symbolic and ritualised with elements such as names and graphic devices. The logo is thus an important element of the visual brand identity that aims to create such loyalty.

The *visual brand identity* is a combination of the brand name, logo, symbols, graphics, advertisements, design, colours and style used to distinguish it from other brand identities. These elements make up the brand’s visual code. These elements are

¹⁴ Denotation refers to the literal or obvious conceptual meaning of a sign, while connotation refers to the figurative and associated mental concepts and meanings of a sign (Chandler 1999; Fourie 2001:346).

¹⁵ The author recognises that the discussion of denotation and connotation is brief here, but the purpose is to describe and focus on the concepts and elements of branding and corporate identity. Denotation and connotation as semiotic processes are explored in greater details in section 3.6.3.

¹⁶ Danesi (2002:187) comments that the word *logo* is the abbreviation of the word logograph.

mainly found in an organisation's communication material, and they are tangible, visible and designed (Olins 1989:7). Throughout his work, Olins (1989:9) is primarily "concerned with how the visual style of an organization affects its positioning in the market; and how the corporate purpose [or identity] is made visible through design and behaviour".

The visual brand identity is not *the* corporate brand identity, but is indeed one of the most important resources to establish communication and a relationship between an organisation and its stakeholders. The visual brand identity is in itself a rich, composite sign, a visual signifier expressing or signifying a company's core values associated with their products and services, in order to create a positive relationship between brand proprietor and stakeholder. The visual brand identity is sent from proprietor to stakeholder to communicate the brand's core values and also allows for feedback from its stakeholders in an ongoing process of communication or semiosis. The next section explores the specific instance of television branding.

3.5 The on-air elements of television channel branding

Branding has been discussed in a general sense thus far, but television network or channel branding requires a discussion of its own, since it involves a unique set of circumstances, definitions and jargon which emerged with the practice of television channel branding. Television branding, and the creation of idents and channel promotions, have traditionally been the task of in-house designers and editors, but in recent years have become increasingly sophisticated in terms of visual appeal and technical intricacy. An increase in sophistication also necessitates an increase in techniques, in turn resulting in an increase in terms and definitions associated with television channel branding as a specific instance of branding.

Robert Bellamy and Paul Traud (2000:18) provide useful definitions regarding the branding of television channels, and explain that "[i]n television, the brand can be represented by call letters or an acronym, logo, company wordmark (name), theme, jingle, sound, or some mixture of these, often in combination with individual programme promotion, designed to differentiate one station/ channel/ programme from another". The term *brand* in television can also refer to specific programmes that are considered

brands in their own right, but a *television brand* is mostly regarded as the specific television channel or television network (Bellamy & Traud 2000:128).

Defining and conceptualising *television brands* are different from rationalisations of brands in other industries due to intrinsic and historical variables; and four such differences are pointed out by Bellamy and Traud (2000:134-135). The first aspect is that the television brand denotes a television channel with uninterrupted surges of television content, thus enabling a steady opportunity for self-promotion (through bugs and idents) so that the source of the brand is the brand itself (Bellamy & Traud 2000:134).

The second and perhaps most characteristic aspect of the television brand is that “price is rarely a consideration in television” (Bellamy & Traud 2000:135). This is especially applicable to South African terrestrial television, where all viewers are subject to general television licence fees only.¹⁷ A third difference is that consumer loyalty to one brand or is nonexistent in television, since “[t]elevision has always operated with the assumption that viewers will sample other channels/networks” (Bellamy & Traudt 2000:135) and that channel surfing according to favourite programme schedules is inevitable. The fourth and final aspect is that “television is more ephemeral and nontangible than most other products and services” (Bellamy & Traud 2000:135). They maintain that branding is therefore “more important in television than in many other businesses, as awareness and image essentially are all television has to ‘sell’ to the viewing audience that it must create” (Bellamy & Traud 2000:135).

Television channel branding has become necessary to differentiate between channels in a multichannel environment since the advent of satellite and cable television (Chan-Olmsted & Kim 2001:79; McDowell & Batten 2005:3). The term *branding* and its use in the American television market emerged and became popular in the early 1990s (Chan-Olmsted & Kim 2001:79). The increase in television channels – and thus an increase in competition – in the 1990s, encouraged a “deeper interest in the art and

¹⁷ In other words it does not matter if the viewer prefers one SABC channel above the others, or if the viewer only watches e-tv, since the viewer has access to all the terrestrial channels regardless. The brands of satellite television channels are somewhat of an exception to the aspect of price, since viewers are able to modify their subscription to satellite channels according to individual preferences and budgets. Even then, the price aspect and its influence on viewer choices seems less than the influence of price on other consumer brand choices.

science of brand management” (McDowell & Batten 2005:3). These developments in the television industry created a need for channel controllers to “ensure that viewers knew immediately what channel they were tuned to, and what that channels stood for” (Elen 2003:[sp]).

It appears that the need to differentiate between television channels is thus the most important aspect regarding television channel branding, but a television brand is also much more than a channel differentiator. Peter Meech (1996:69) accurately describes television brands in the following manner; they “constitute a hybrid form of *both* promotional sign *and* commodity sign”; their function is cognitive and effective; they inform or remind the viewers of the channel they are watching; and “express – visually and audibly – aspects of the broadcasting company’s self-perception as an organisation in the hope of creating a favourable image and attitude among its audience”. Meech’s (1996) description of a television brand is more in alignment with Olins’ (1989) holistic approach to branding discussed in the previous section.

The increasing interest and emphasis on television branding since the 1990s has not necessarily delivered a large increase in academic studies in this field. Bellamy and Traud (2000:131) note that “academic studies of television branding are scarce in both media and marketing literatures”. Most texts on television branding are written from either a marketing perspective, or a design or aesthetic perspective. For example, Martin Lambie-Nairn (1997) writes from an aesthetic perspective providing insight into the discipline and graphic techniques of television channel branding. Walter McDowell and Alan Batten (2005), on the other hand, write from a marketing point of view and suggest key principles and practices for the branding of television channels. So do Bellamy and Traud (2000), who provide useful insight into television branding in general. Meech (1996; 1999a; 1999b & 2001) regards corporate identity in the television broadcast environment as a noteworthy academic contribution.

Writing about the promotion of television programmes and television channels, Meech (1999a) attempts a typology of the on-air elements that occur during junctions¹⁸ on British television and defines these elements as *clutter*,¹⁹ referring to those elements

¹⁸ This “junction” is a term used in industry jargon to describe the break between television programmes (Meech 1999a:37).

¹⁹ Meech (1999b:293) explains his preference for the term ‘clutter’ in the following way: “despite its negative overtones of disorder and confusion, [‘clutter’] is preferable to the more

used by the channel for self-promotion and identification, thus excluding television programmes and advertisements. This *clutter* is an essential part of television *flow*,²⁰ a metaphor suggested by Raymond Williams (1975) to indicate the manner in which the continuous river of images and sounds are channelled through television²¹ (Allen 1992:12). McAllister and Giglio (2005:28) maintain that techniques like television programme promotions, cliff-hangers (which appear before a commercial break) and programme scheduling, in combination with the characteristics of television as a medium, decrease the incongruence between images on the screen and enhance their ability to flow from one to the next. Further, they state that ease of channel switching, similarity of programme structure and uniform scheduling on most channels renders the flow as an “inter-channel experience” (McAllister & Giglio 2005: 28).

For Meech (1999a), the television flow, or *clutter*²² as he calls it, is “becoming more strategically important, more technically sophisticated and more professionally managed”. Gone are the days when a “broadcaster would produce the corporate identity – the logo, the idents and other material, right down to the letterhead – in-house, in their own presentation graphics department” (Elen 2003:[sp]). The simple and sometimes haphazard animated images and accompanying sounds have since evolved into complete identity statements that provide the viewer “an instant feeling for what channel they were tuned to, and what that channel stood for” (Elen 2003:[sp]).

Branding a television channel involves much more than putting a logo at the bottom of the television screen. Branding is a holistic approach and the creation of a visual brand identity is merely one, although important aspect within such an approach. The visual brand identity of a television channel primarily manifests on-air (through its channel

informative but cumbersome ‘non-programme editorial items’ [...and includes] title sequences, end credits, production company credits, sponsorship idents/ ‘break-bumpers’, presentation announcers, menus, clocks, programme promos or trails, station idents and corporate campaigns”.

²⁰ Bignell (2004:23) states that fundamental works in this field include “books by Raymond Williams (1974) and John Ellis (1982), whose interest was in the flow of programmes in the television schedule, and how viewers rarely watch programmes singly but instead as part of a flow of programmes and commercials over a period of hours. Viewers also switch from one programme or channel to another, composing their own ‘text’ of television from these segments”.

²¹ Williams (1975:86) describes this continuous flow of television texts as possibly *the* defining characteristic of broadcast television.

²² Meech (1999b) states that clutter helps to provide a sense of “atmosphere as well as suggesting the kind of wider audience with which individual viewers are in company.”

idents, on-air promotions and own advertisements), and also appears off-air (through print advertisements, billboards, and its website, for example).

For Meech (1999a:39), *logos*²³ are the most important component of television clutter, identifying corporate emblems of television companies through “an assemblage of shape, colour and typography and, ideally, connoting its essential values”. Meech (1999a:39) maintains that logos (Figure 4) are the most ubiquitous of all categories of clutter, “appearing off-air on everything from annual reports to outside broadcast vehicles as well as on the television screen”. Another related element in the typology of clutter is the *dog* or *bug* (Figure 4), a graphic, miniature logo located in the corner of the television screen.²⁴ Meech (1999:42) indicates that “some maintain it stands for ‘digitally originated graphic’, others for ‘digital on-screen graphic’ or even ‘downstream originated graphic’ (i.e. added to the signal at the vision-mixing stage)”. Sometimes it is translucent in appearance and also known as a watermark. The function of the dog or bug (hereafter only referred to as a dog) is similar to the function of idents, namely to function primarily as a station signifier (Meech 1999:40).



Figure 4: Screen shot with the SABC Africa logo (centre) and SABC Africa dog (top left), 2006. (Screen grab, photographed by author.)

²³ Meech (1996:70) uses the term ‘corporate logo’ in a generic manner “to encompass symbols, logotypes (full names), monograms (initials), and composites of these.”

²⁴ Meech (1999a:40) clarifies that dogs are not “strictly clutter in the sense of occurring in the junctions between programmes”. They are, however, an important element of the television channel’s visual brand identity.

Another element of clutter (or visual branding) on television is the station identification, or channel *idents* (Figure 5), occasionally called stings (Meech 1999a:39). A channel ident, according to Meech (1996:70), is a “short animated sequence that appears between programmes, either in unchanging form or in a variety of seasonal or other variations, to signify the channel and its ethos.” Bignell (2004:308) defines channel idents as “the symbols representing production companies, television channels, etc., often comprising graphics or animation”. Idents are “moments of television which are frequently repeated and familiar, giving a brand identity to television broadcasters” (Bignell 2004:10). Idents make it possible to combine important programme information with channel branding, and often make use of technical innovation and interesting visual imagery in order to effectively combine marketing objectives and design considerations (Meech 1999a:39-40).



Figure 5: SABC Africa ident, 2006.
(Screen grabs, photographed by author.)

A fourth component of television clutter is called the *special* (Meech 1999a:40), “a promotional vehicle devised and produced for special occasions or purposes”. Meech (1999a:40) clarifies that idents appear consistently during junctions, whereas specials²⁵ (Figure 6) only occur intermittently according to specific events or specific marketing goals.

The fifth component in Meech’s typology of clutter, and also the “items which individually take up most airtime and yet paradoxically are the most ephemeral and least prestigious are *promos* or *trails*” (Meech 1999a:40). The main purpose of promos or trails is to advertise programmes or series. Promos and trails are often “[c]reated inhouse by small teams consisting normally of a producer/director and editor, they have traditionally been disparaged by observers as formulaic hack work” (Meech 1999a:40). The promos and trails (Figure 7) have become increasingly creative, and the building of

²⁵ Specific examples of ‘clutter’ such as specials, logos, idents, promos and dogs will be discussed in Chapter Four.

bridges between programmes and channels through imaginative promos is an important part of the branding process (Meech 1999a:41).



Figure 6: SABC Africa special for Africa Day, 2006.
(Screen grabs, photographed by author.)



Figure 7: SABC Africa channel promo, 2006.
(Screen grabs, photographed by author.)

Meech (1999a:41) states that the most noticeable and memorable of the on-air promotional elements are logos, dogs, station idents, stings, specials and trailers. Other mechanisms (Figure 8) include programme and merchandising slides, menus, clocks and break-bumpers ... [as well as] acoustic features as sound effects, musical signifiers and continuity announcers” (Meech 1999a:41). These on-air corporate branding techniques or “brandcasting” as Meech (1999b:292-293) calls it, aspire to communicate a cohesive message about a multifaceted entity or organisation to a large audience of diverse viewers (Meech 1999a:42).



Figure 8: SABC Africa slides, menus and break-bumper idents, 2006.
(Screen grabs, photographed by author.)

The next section explores the cohesive message communicated to the audience in terms of the signs, codes and meanings in television channel branding as part of the process of semiosis.

3.6 The signs, codes and meanings in television channel branding as a process of semiosis

Semiosis is the semiological term for communication and it “literally means the way in which any sign functions in the mind of an interpreter (communicator and recipient) in order to convey a particular meaning in a particular situation” (Fourie 1996:20). The sender and receiver of the communicated message are situated in their respective positions based on their use of signs and codes. The creation, use and interpretation of such signs and codes are part of this process of semiosis. Pieter Fourie (1996:20) states that the concept semiosis “is the active form of the term semiotics”, embracing all the components that play a part in the communication process.

Branding is a signification process or a process of semiosis. The discussion of branding as a process of semiosis pursues the definition of semiotics as “the science of signs and codes and the meanings they convey” (Fourie 2001:326). The three key elements, concepts or “instruments” of semiotics, as Fourie (1996:35) calls them, are signs, codes and meanings. The following section thus explores the signs and codes of television branding and the meanings they convey.

3.6.1 Signs and sign systems

Semiotics usually departs with a consideration of the smallest unit or element of meaning in a form of communication, called a *sign* (Seiter 1992:33; Fourie 1996:35). Unlike language, however, “television does not conveniently break down into discrete elements” (Seiter 1992:42). The images on screen are already “combinations of several signs at once and involves a complex set of denotation and connotations” (Seiter 1992:43). A *sign* can be an image, words, sounds, flavours, acts or objects, in fact, “[a]nything can be a sign as long as someone interprets it as ‘signifying’ something – referring to or *standing for* something other than itself” (Chandler 2002:17).

Saussure (1983:67) defines the linguistic sign (whether written or spoken form) as

a two-sided psychological entity, ... a combination of a concept and a sound pattern. ... We propose to keep the term *sign* to designate the whole, but to replace *concept* and *sound pattern* respectively by *signification* and *signal*. The latter terms have the advantage of indicating the distinction which separates each from the other and both from the whole which they are part.

Saussure's model of the sign therefore indicates that a sign consists of two parts, a signifier (sound pattern) and a signified (mental concept).²⁶ The "sound pattern (signifier) is the hearer's psychological impression of a sound, as given to him by the evidence of his senses ... and may be called a 'material' element" (Saussure 1983:66). The concept (signified), on the other hand, is usually more abstract (Saussure 1983:66). It is a mental concept or a concept in the mind rather than a physical thing.

It is possible to equate the Saussurean (1983) model of the sign and his distinction between the signifier and signified with Meenaghan's (1995) notion of the brand and the distinction he makes between identity and image (Figure 9). For Saussure (1983), the *sign* is the sum of the *signifier* and the *signified* (or the combination of the sound pattern and the concept, or the signal and the signification). Similarly the *brand* can be conceived as the sum of the *identity* and the *image*. Keeping in mind that Olins (1989:7) defines corporate *identity* as the sum of the organisation's products or services; buildings or physical environment; information or communication material; and the staff and organisational behaviour, Meenaghan's (1995) *identity* resembles Saussure's (1983) *signifier* in that both elements are the material or physical aspect of the *sign* or *brand*.

Both the *identity* and the *signifier* can be controlled or influenced directly by the sender (sign producer or brand proprietor), and both involve the aspect of encoding by the sender. The *signified* and *image* on the other hand, involve the aspect of decoding by the receiver, viewer or consumer and exist as an abstract or mental concept in the mind of the receiver and cannot be controlled directly and accurately by the sender.

²⁶ Daniel Chandler (2002:20) notes that Saussure's "*signified* is not to be identified directly with ... a referent [an object existing in the world] but is a *concept* in the mind – not a thing but the notion of a thing. ... Thus, for Saussure the linguistic sign is wholly immaterial".

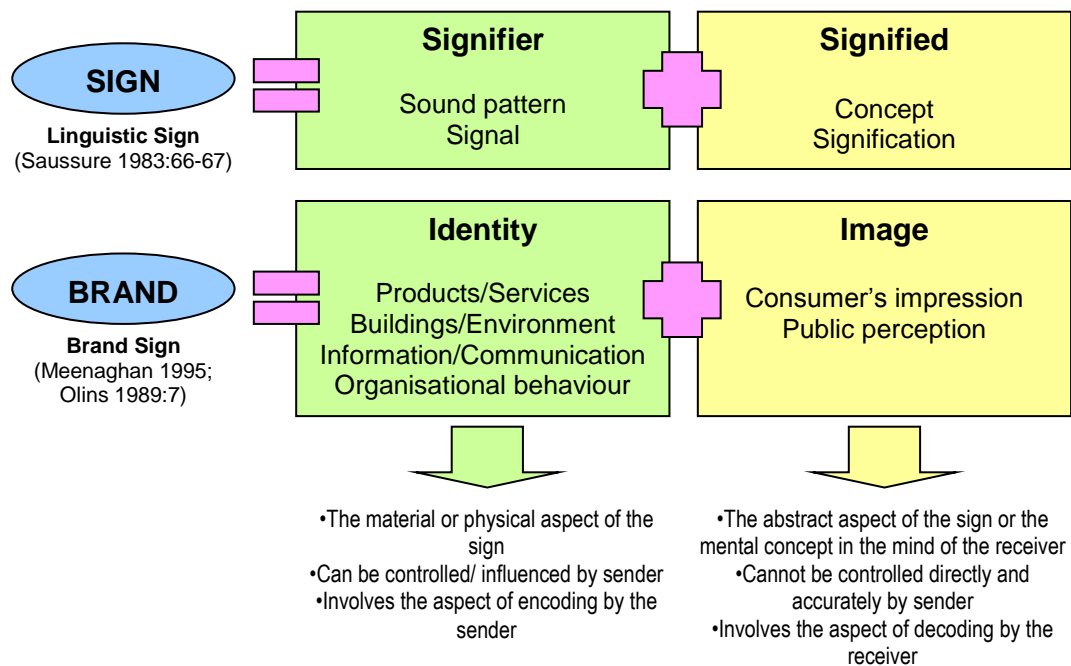


Figure 9: Schematic representation of the similarities between Saussure's signifier and signified and Meenaghan's identity and image. (Author's representation.)

The Saussurean model and its relation to branding may appear simplistic presented in this way, when in fact it is more complex to clearly determine the boundaries of the signifier, the signified and the sign. In terms of television channel branding the signifier/ sound pattern/ signal/ material element can be visual or aural. It can include jingles and other audio mnemonic devices; representational and non-representational images; photographic material; linguistic signs; graphic signs; logos; slogans; idents or stings; dogs; advertisements; trailers; menus and clocks, for example (Bignell 1997:141-143; Meech 1999a:41). These visual and aural brand elements that appear on the television channel can be described as the signifiers. These are the signals or material aspects and can be controlled and changed by the sender, and it therefore includes the act of encoding by the communicator.

However, these same brand elements described above as signifiers can also be regarded as the signs, for example the logo that is mentioned as a signifier above is also an example of a sign. An SABC television channel logo (sign) is the sum of the channel name; the colours; the style in which it is executed; the graphic numeric symbol; and the slogan (signifiers) and the public perception of the television channel (signified). In an equivalent way the signifieds (or mental concepts) can become

signifiers in further chains of signification, since meanings are organised in chains of signification (Dyer 1982:123). Similarly Chandler (1999) notes that “[w]ithin a single language, one signifier may refer to many signifieds ... and one signified may be referred to by many signifiers”. In other words the margins of signs, signifiers and signifieds are not always clear when Saussurean semiotics is applied to brands and branding.

Saussure (1983) makes an additional contribution in his conception of the linguistic sign that is particularly visible in television branding. For Saussure (1983:67, 78) the linguistic sign is arbitrary since there is no intrinsic or natural relationship between the signifier and the signified. The meaning of the linguistic sign depends entirely on the context, or the social and conventional use of language in that context. A pictorial sign or a television channel brand element (such as a logo, animated figure, or brushstroke) that appears on screen is entirely arbitrary too, since the meaning of its signifier and signified depends on the context and the social and cultural conventions controlling the use of such signs.

A logo with the brand name illustrated in red can carry meanings of romance, or meanings of revolution, depending on the context. If the logo consists of the brand name in red lettering placed next to a heart symbol, it would carry meanings of romance, and if the logo consists of red lettering placed next to the symbol of a raised, clenched fist, it would carry meanings of rebellion or uprising. The red lettering is thus arbitrary and the meaning agreed by convention and its relation to the context (Bignell 1997:8-9). The arbitrariness of signs mean that they can be polysemic (having many meanings) (Lacey 1998:58).

Whereas Saussure’s sign consists out of two parts, signifier and signified, Peirce offers a triadic model that consist of the *representamen*, the *interpretant* and the *object*, and the interaction between these three parts is referred to by Peirce (1931-58, 2.228) as “semiosis”. Lars Christensen and Søren Askegaard (2001) offer useful examples and models of Peircean (1931) semiotics applied to corporate communications. In terms of the signifying process of branding, the sign or representamen can be a “gesture, a logo, an advertisement, a slogan, a product, a package, a narrative, a written text, a set of behaviours, or even an entire persuasive campaign” (Christensen & Askegaard 2001:303). The object which the sign or representamen stands for, is sometimes also

called the “referent – an equivalent to the notion of the world as it ‘is’ in itself – in the present context, for example, the so-called personality of a product or the ‘real’ character of an organization” (Christensen & Askegaard 2001:303).

Lastly, the interpretant “can be thought of as a mental image of the interpreter created or stimulated by the sign - an image that links the sign to its object or referent, just as the word ‘IBM’ creates a mental image that links the three letters I, B and M with a large corporation that produces computers” (Christensen & Askegaard 2001:303). The relation between the three elements representamen (or sign), interpretant and object is illustrated in Figure 10.

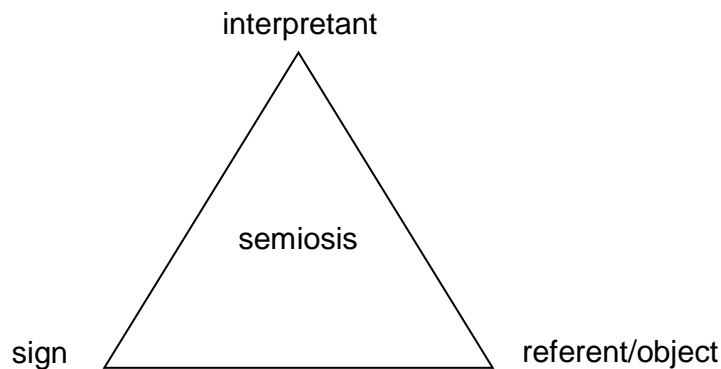


Figure 10: The signifying process.
(Christensen & Askegaard 2001:303.)

Corporate identity is the total sum of the signs representing an organisation to its stakeholders (Christensen & Askegaard 2001:304; Meenaghan 1995:25). An organisation’s corporate identity is what represents it despite the sometime intangible, incoherent, fragmented and perhaps self-contradictory nature of the set of signs (Christensen & Askegaard 2001:303). In Meenaghan’s (1995:25) terms, this identity (or sign) is sent. There is a need to make a clear distinction between the signs carefully manufactured to communicate and promote an organisation and its products and services, and the unintended signs (negative rumours, for example) (Christensen & Askegaard 2001:303). The intended or manufactured signs form part of the organisation’s formal profile and “often receives more prominent attention internally than the other representations of the organization” (Christensen & Askegaard 2001:304-305).

Corporate image (Figure 11), on the other hand, is the perception of the company that an audience holds mentally and is received or perceived (Meenaghan 1995:24). Corporate image is the “impression created or stimulated by a sign or a set of signs” (Christensen & Askegaard 2001:305). The image is therefore equivalent to the Peircian concept of the interpretant (Christensen & Askegaard 2001:305). Corporate image is a collective or partly shared interpretant and also a “complex construct generated by signs that has come to represent the organization in the minds of its various audiences” (Christensen & Askegaard 2001:305). Christensen and Askegaard (2001:305) recognise a need to distinguish between an organisation’s “official self-image” and its “reputation” or general impression; two frequently contrasting impressions. A successful brand identity is one where the self-image and reputation are very similar.

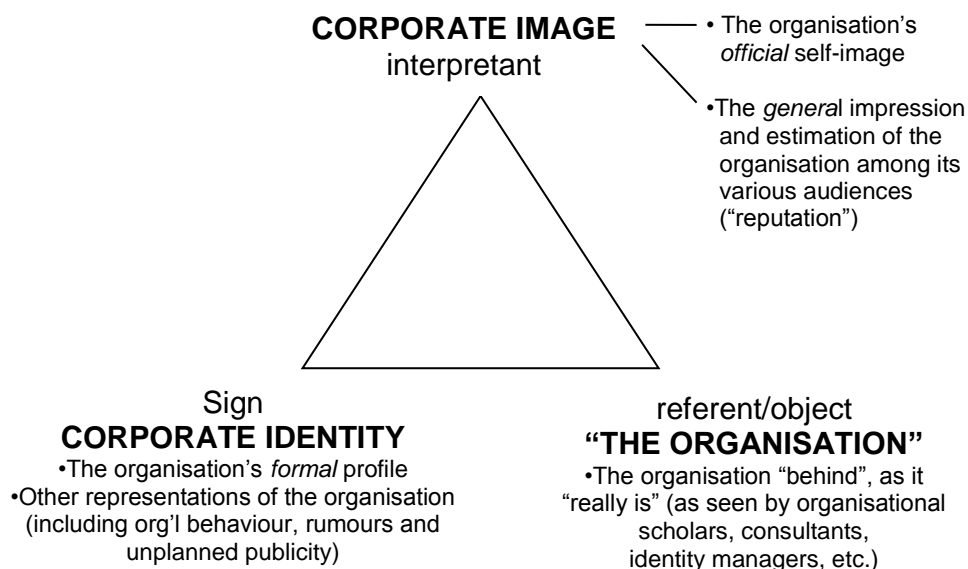


Figure 11: The semiotic dimensions of corporate identity and corporate image. (Christensen & Askegaard 2001:305.)

Chandler (2002:35-36) further contemplates the meaning of signs and sign systems. He maintains that the meaning of a sign emerges from its interpretation rather than from the sign itself (Chandler 2002:35). He also notes that semioticians distinguish between a sign and a ‘sign vehicle’, and that the ‘sign vehicle’ is a ‘signifier’ to Saussureans, while Peirceans call it a ‘representamen’ (Chandler 2002:35-36). The sign is thus more than just a sign vehicle. If the term “sign” is used loosely, the distinction can be lost. Within Saussurean theory, some references to ‘sign’ refer to the

signifier, and likewise, Peirce also uses 'sign' when he actually refers to the *representamen*. As Chandler (2002:35-35) states, "the *signifier* or *representamen* is the *form* in which the sign appears (such as the spoken or written form of a word) whereas the *sign* is the whole meaningful ensemble" (Chandler 2002:35-36).

Pierce (1931) also contributes further to the notion of the sign by classifying three distinct types of signs that are particularly useful in the analysis of images. Chandler (2002:36) notes that Peirce's "classification of distinct 'types of signs' ... is more usefully interpreted in terms of differing 'modes of relationship' between sign vehicles and their referents" which are *symbolic*, *iconic* and *indexical* (Chandler 2002:36; Fourie 2001:335; Adams 1996:137; Lacey 1998:65-66 & Dyer 1982:124-125).

The *iconic* aspect of a sign is the recognisable aspect in the sense that it resembles and relates to that which it represents (Adams 1996:137; Lacey 1998:66). The icon and its relation to television channel branding can be exemplified with an example from SABC2's channel branding. If the break-bumper or ident consist of a photograph of a family, the channel name and number (or logo), and the slogan (feel at home), it is the photograph that forms the iconic sign. The photograph or iconic sign of the father and three children resembles the family and the family members it depicts, but is not the actual family (Dyer 1982:124). It is thus only a resemblance of the family.

However, Lacey (1998:66) includes that an "iconic sign does not necessarily have to resemble *physically* what it refers to" and provides the example of ordinance survey maps that are graphical iconic signs. With this example Lacey (1998:66) illustrates that iconic signs are not only photographs and can also include graphic signs, for example. The relationship between the signifier and the signified of the iconic sign is "one of resemblance or likeness" (Dyer 1982:124).

The relationship between the signifier and the signified in the *indexical* sign is direct, sequential and causal (Bignell 1997:15; Lacey 1998:66; Dyer 1982:124). The sign of rising mercury in a thermometer is indexical of the rise in temperature, so that the sign (rising mercury in a thermometer) is caused by the thing it signifies (rising temperature) (Bignell 1997:15; Lacey 1998:66).

In television channel branding all sorts of indexical signs appear on the screen, for example a clock on SABC2 is indexical of the commencement of the news; a graphic sign resembling a film strip is indexical of the start of a film and a menu ident with a list of programme titles and times are indexical of the evening's programmes. The images or signs that appear in the junctions between programmes can be iconic (whether it is of photographic or graphic nature), but are simultaneously an *index* that represents more than itself: they also point to the end of one programme and the beginning of another or the beginning of a series of advertisements, for example. Adams (1996:137) notes that the indexical possibilities of a work of art (or graphic design, in the case of television channel branding) is extensive and include elements of style; application of techniques; social, political and economic contexts; and the viewer's response, among other things.

In the case of a *symbolic* sign, "the signifier does not resemble or cause the signified, but is related to it only by convention or 'contract'" (Dyer 1982:125). In other words the "relationship between the signifier or signified in some signs is arbitrary based neither on resemblance nor on any existential link" (Dyer 1982:125).

An example from the SABC Africa channel branding can be used to gain clarity about the notion of a *symbolic* sign. The symbol of the butterfly in the SABC Africa idents (Figure 12) is a symbol for rebirth, revival and transformation – not so much because the butterfly embodies the process of transformation, but because the butterfly has been used by members of some cultures to signify rebirth and transformation (Dyer 1982:125). The meaning of the symbol (butterfly) depends on the "conventional, agreed-upon meanings [rebirth], and as such is related to Saussure's sign" (Adams 1996:137). The symbolic sign (butterfly) is arbitrary and exists as a symbol only because there is a consensus regarding its meaning (transformation) (Lacey 1998:66).

Dyer (1982:125) also states that brand images (in this case the visual and aural brand elements of television channels) perform as symbols for the product, and suggests that it may be more important to note that often iconic, indexical and symbolic signs overlap and are simultaneously present in many advertising campaigns.



Figure 12: SABC Africa idents, 2006.
(Screen grabs photographed by author.)

In addition to a distinction between different types of signs, one can also distinguish between different types of sign systems (Fourie 1996:45). Fourie (1996:45) defines a sign system as “a group of signs with much the same character, integrated by the same rules of grammar [for example] language, style of dress, traffic signs, mathematics, music, physical movements ... television, film and photography (the electronic visual media)”. Television channel branding is a unique sign system “with its own rules, grammar, syntax or codes” (Fourie 1996:45), and it is a sign system that shares characteristics and elements with film, television, advertising and linguistic sign systems. This is in line with Fourie’s (1996:45) observation that “we seldom use a sign system in isolation [and that] we generally use several sign systems simultaneously” when communicating. This discussion of sign systems with unique rules, syntax or codes brings us to the next element or instrument in the process of semiosis, namely codes.

3.6.2 Codes

The sign discussed in the previous section can be considered as the smallest unit in semiotics, but signs are combined according to a “so-called *recipe* or technique” (Fourie 1996:50) to convey meaning, and it is this recipe or technique that is the code (Fourie 1996:50). The code is thus the larger semiotic unit (Fourie 1996:50) or system in which signs are organised into groups (Bignell 1997:9). Codes enable the “formation and understanding of messages (encoding and decoding) [and are] a set of rules or

and interpretative device known to both transmitter and receiver, which assigns a certain meaning or context to a certain sign” (Dyer 1982:134). For Bignell (1997:10), the “concept of a code becomes very useful in dividing signs into groups, and working out how meaning of the signs depend on their membership of codes”.

Fourie (1996:50) also reiterates that codes are more than a mere means to combine signs and have meaning in themselves, and this meaning “is usually conventional and social”. In other words, codes are consensual “forms of social knowledge which are derived from social practices and beliefs” and assist in the organisation and understanding of the world in terms of “dominant meaning patterns” (Dyer 1982:135, Lacey 1998:31). Such dominant meaning patterns are mentally present when one interprets meaning and reflect on things, and although such patterns are often taken for granted, they actually differ from time to time and culture to culture (Dyer 1982:135). The interpreter’s understanding of (and the significance of) an individual sign depends on the recognition of its belonging to a code that has specific meaning for him or her (Bignell 1997:10).

In the case of corporate branding and identity it is possible to view the brand as the smallest element or sign. The recipe, larger semiotic unit or the set of rules that govern their use, can be perceived as branding. The practice of branding operates by making use of established conventions. The meanings of all the signs that make up the brand thus depend on their membership to the practice of branding. Applied to television channel branding in particular, the larger interpretative frameworks or codes include the conventions and codes of branding, the codes of camera editing and techniques, the codes in design, cultural codes, linguistic codes and stylistic codes. The relationship between all the signs that compose the visual brand identity of the television channel (name, slogan, logo, colour, icons, symbols, graphics, photographs, jingles and audio mnemonics, for example) is determined and directed by, for example, television codes, branding codes, design codes and social codes (Fourie 1996:50).

Writing about television, Bignell (2004:88) describes the codes and connotations of the title sequences in news programmes, and this description can easily be applied or compared to the branded idents and channel sequences appearing between programmes. Bignell (2004:88) notes that the music accompanying the title sequences of news programmes often have “music with loud major chords played on brass

instruments [... to connote] importance, dignity and drama”. The music accompanying idents are similarly distinct and catchy in order to identify the channel and entice the viewer to watch upcoming programmes. Furthermore, title sequences and channel idents

feature computer graphics in fast-moving sequences, syntagms in semiotic terminology, connoting technological sophistication. The function of title sequences in television news programmes [or idents] is to establish the status of news [or the channel and its programs] as significant and authoritative, and also to differentiate one channel's [...programmes] from another, providing 'brand recognition'. The title sequences [...and idents] share many of the functions of television commercials, in differentiating products which are very similar and endowing them with connotations supporting a familiar identity. Title sequences are sequences of signs which collectively signify the boundaries between one part of the continual flow of television broadcasting and the rest of it (Bignell 2004:88-89).

The television viewer's understanding of the flow of television and the sequences of graphic clutter depends on the viewer's understanding of codes. Codes thus form the framework of social knowledge around which meaning is structured and around which meaning is encoded and decoded.

Since they draw from a variety of codes, television channel brands consist of many messages (Dyer 1982:135). It is thus likely that the viewer of the channel interprets the multifaceted message “as an integrated text according to the media/cultural codes at his or her disposal” (Dyer 1982:135). If the codes are examined, the meaning of television channel brands and the manner in which channel branding works become clearer because the codes allow multiple messages to be combined in the text (Dyer 1982:136).

3.6.3 Meanings

The meaning of a text, or more specifically the meaning of a television channel brand, has intricate facets and can be explored from various angles. The exploration of the codes of television channel branding already indicates that a number of meanings can be deduced depending on the interpreter's knowledge and familiarity with certain codes. “Viewer's assign meaning to images (signs) and experience them in terms of their own knowledge, background and experience” (Fourie 2001:346).

A useful point of departure or way to ponder meaning is to consider its relation to the semiotic concepts of denotation and connotation. Chandler (1999) states that “denotation and connotation are terms describing the relationship between the signifier and its signified”, and that meaning includes both these two concepts.

For the purpose of distinguishing between these two terms, denotation can be described as the “definitional, ‘literal’, ‘obvious’, or ‘commonsense’ meaning of a sign” (Chandler 1999). Denotation is about the identification of a sign; it is about the perception of something through any of our senses, and it is such perception that is the denotation (Lacey 1998:57). In terms of branding one can consider the logo as a sign, and that this logo denotes the name or identity of an organisation. Denotation “refers to the literal meaning of a sign; to what is ‘objectively’ present and easily recogni[s]ed or identified” (Dyer 1982:128). To take another example, this time from television channel branding specifically, one can say that an image in an ident denotes that what it is a picture of (Seiter 1992:39); for example, the illustration of a butterfly on the SABC Africa idents denotes a butterfly insect (as shown in the example in Figure 12). Denotation therefore refers to the “literal or dictionary meaning (conceptual meaning) attached to a sign” (Fourie 2001:346).

Connotation, on the other hand, is the associated meaning of a sign, or the associated mental concept of the sign (Lacey 1998:59). Connotation is the meaning that lies beyond the literal meaning, thus lying beyond the denotation of a sign (Dyer 1982:128). Connotations are the cultural associations and connections that signs have (Bignell 2004:88). To take a well known example, the Nike logo with its swoosh symbol denotes the name or identity of an organisation, but its connotations may vary from person to person. For one interpreter this logo may connote desirable, quality footwear; as for another, it may give rise to connotations of the unjust exploitation of cheap labour (Klein 2000). The term connotation thus refers to the “socio-cultural and ‘personal’ associations” of the sign and “are typically related to the interpreter’s class, age, gender, [and] ethnicity”, for example (Chandler 1999).

Connotation thus depends on the viewer’s knowledge and social context, and is therefore subjective. It is, however, possible that many interpreters of the same sign will have similar connotative meanings they attach to such a sign, because the

“connotations have reached the status of a social consensus” (Lacey 1998:59). This occurs because the meaning of such signs “involves the associations of signs with other cultural codes of meaning” (Barker 2003:92). The connotation is “activated by the means of conventions or codes” (Dyer 1982:128). For example, it is possible that South African viewers associate the SABC Africa idents (and its signs including the butterfly, the sun, and the shape of the African continent as shown in Figure 12) with rebirth, growth, illumination and an African Renaissance. The connotation of the African Renaissance is conjured up by the denotation of the ident and its associations drawn from design conventions and (stylistic, television and cultural) codes.

Although a distinction between the two terms aid in a better understanding of denotation and connotation, it is not always possible to clearly distinguish between the two (Chandler 1999). Seiter (1992:39) notes that in television criticism “the difference between connotation and denotation seems rather mechanical” and difficult to isolate since the signs in television are already complex, layered messages or texts. Chandler (1999) additionally states that “no sign is purely denotative”. Stated in another manner, no sign is free of connotation, and no sign is free of value judgements. The value judgements are influenced by cultural codes that provide a sign with connotational frameworks and associative attributes (Chandler 1999). In this way a sign has no purely ‘neutral’ or purely ‘literal’ meaning because it is part of a sign system situated in a cultural and historical context.

For Chandler (1999) “denotation is just another connotation” but it is a connotation that has been naturalised. Barker (2003:92) believes that where connotations are accepted as “normal” and “natural”, “they act as conceptual maps of meaning by which to make sense of the world”, and that these maps of meaning are cultural constructions, or myths.²⁷

Such socially constructed maps of meaning (or myth) and its relation to denotation and connotation can be considered in conjunction with Barthes’ spatialised metaphor of the levels of meaning (Barthes 1972:114-115). This spatialised metaphor points to the layered or complex structure of meaning (see Figure 13).

²⁷ Myth has been discussed in Chapter Two in terms of the power structures it masks in order to uphold the ideologies of the dominant classes. This section explores myth from a semiotic angle, and as such, it is useful to consider myth and its relation to denotation and connotation in conjunction with Barthes’ (1972:114-115) spatialised metaphor of the levels of meaning.

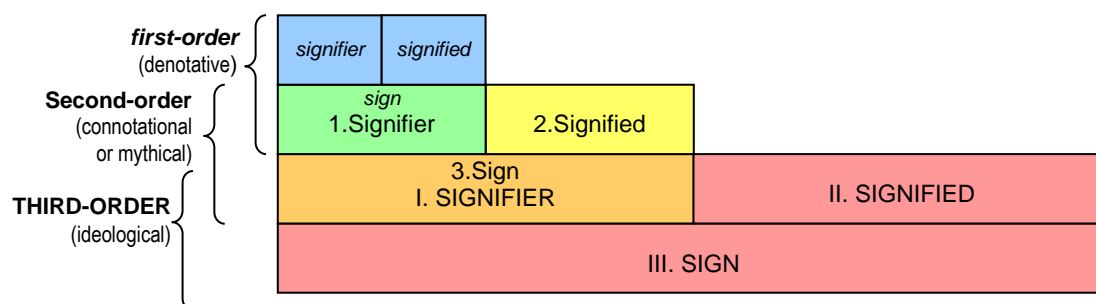


Figure 13: Schematic representation of the layered structure of meaning.
(Barthes 1957:115; Fourie & Karan 2001:475.)

At the first level of meaning (or the first-order of signification), it is the signifier and the signified that constitutes the sign (illustrated by the blue and green rectangles in Figure 13). It is in this first-order of signification that *denotation* occurs (Chandler 1999). The first or denotative level of meaning in channel branding can be perceived as “a non-coded iconic message” (Dyer 1982:128). In the case of an ident as an element of television channel branding, it is the channel’s name, slogan, logo, dog, colours, photographic images, graphic images, backgrounds, linguistic signs, jingles and other audio mnemonics that are the signifiers of the television channel (as stated previously, much similar to the way that a person’s hair colour, facial features, posture and voice are signifiers of a particular individual). What is signified or denoted by the multiple on-screen signifiers is the visual brand identity of the television channel.

Together the individual signifiers in the ident and its signified visual brand identity create non-coded iconic message – a sign – that becomes the condensed representation for the television channel. At the denotative level the ident is thus a sign that serves to identify a particular television channel. In this first-order of signification, the sign (ident) is thus the sum of the signifiers (logo, slogan, images and jingles, for example) and the signified (a specific television channel with unique characteristics).

Connotation, on the other hand, “is a second-order signifying system that uses the first sign, (signifier and signified), as its signifier and attaches an additional meaning, another signified to it” (Seiter 1992:39). It is thus the denotative sign that is used as a signifier in the second level of meaning (illustrated by the green, yellow and orange rectangles in Figure 13). The second or connotational level can be perceived as “a

coded iconic, or symbolic, message” (Dyer 1982:128).²⁸ It is at the second level where connotations, cultural associations and associated meanings emerge. The connotation is therefore a second-order semiological system, or a meta-language (or second language) that speaks about the denotation or the first-level language (Barthes 1972:114-115; Barker 2003:92).

At this level of connotation the ident becomes a signifier that signifies a particular television brand with unique characteristics. The unique television brand, as the signified of the second-order of signification, is a coded iconic or symbolic message that carries a variety of connotations, values and cultural associations. For example, the television brand may carry associations of youthful, revolutionary television (SABC1); family entertainment (SABC2); or quality, upmarket programming (SABC3). Together the ident (signifier) and its television channel brand (signified) becomes yet another sign. At this second level the ident and the television channel brand stands for something other than itself. For example, the SABC Africa channel brand becomes a sign of ‘Africanness’, and of ‘African Renaissance’ in particular. The whole SABC Africa brand (including its products or services; buildings or environment; information or communication; and its organisational behaviour) thus becomes a signifier in another chain of signification. It is at this second level that the meaning of a sign depends heavily on associations and connotations, and it is at this level that the meta-language or *myth* emerges.

‘Africannes’ and ‘African Renaissance’, as connoted by the SABC Africa channel branding, are socially constructed *mythical* meanings (Fourie & Karam 2001:475). Chapter Two briefly described that the idea of ‘African Renaissance’ as a socially constructed myth; a symbolic concept or metaphor of rebirth that serves the neo-liberal economic policies and ideologies, for example Black Economic Empowerment (BEE), that masks the goal to secure power and wealth for the black petit bourgeoisie.

This is not to say that the idea of ‘African Renaissance’ is false, or wrong. At times the myth of the African Renaissance may be considered a ‘useful’ myth, one that creates a map of meaning that supports a positive sense of unity amongst all Africans. In this

²⁸ Dyer (1982:128) states that, in “an essay on semiotics and publicity images, Barthes ... calls the denotative, first level ... a non-coded iconic message and the second level, a coded iconic, or symbolic, message [and that the] latter is based on pre-existing bodies of knowledge of a practical, cultural, national, historic or aesthetic nature”.

case, 'African Renaissance' may be accepted by the majority of Africans (and also South Africans in particular) even though they do not benefit from the centralisation of wealth and power, and even if it goes against what appears to be in their best interest.

Myth serves to justify and naturalise cultural values, and is a servant to the ideology and power structures which the myth serves (Barthes 1977:45-46). Barthes (1972) places emphasis in his work on this second level where *connotations* and *mythical* meanings surface from the interpretation of texts, and the discussion of the African Renaissance myth associated with the SABC Africa channel is an indication that myths are signs that "carry particularly powerful connotations" (Lacey 1998:59).

In addition to the first and second levels of meaning, authors including Fiske and Hartley (1978:43); O'Sullivan *et al* (1994:287); Dyer (1982:94) and Fourie and Karam (2001:475), for example, suggest that a *third* order of signification exists, and that this is the level of *ideology* (illustrated by the orange and red rectangles in Figure 8). In all three levels of signification the tri-dimensional pattern of the signifier, the signified and the sign appears. Stated in another way, at each level (the first, *denotative* level; the second, *connotative or mythical* level; and the third *ideological* level) the meaning has a signifier, a signified and a sign that evolves according to the chains of signification. At the third level one can say that the denotation of the SABC Africa television channel branding and the connotation or myth of African Renaissance combine to produce and support ideology (for example, cultural imperialism and Black Economic Empowerment), thus creating a third order of signification (Chandler 1999). Ideology is thus the third-order of signification where a "sign reflects major culturally-variable concepts underpinning a particular worldview – such as masculinity, femininity, freedom, individualism, objectivism, [... Africanness] and so on" (Chandler 1999).

The above interpretation of meaning in the SABC Africa channel branding and its association with the African Renaissance myth that serves the ruling ideology of Black Economic Empowerment is only one interpretation of meaning in the branding of this television channel. The signs used in the SABC Africa channel branding are arbitrary, and may thus have many meanings. The meanings in the branding of the SABC Africa channel are thus polysemic (Lacey 1998:58) and are influenced by the cultural, economic, political and personal context of the interpreter and the interpreted text.

The brand identity of the SABC Africa and any associations with 'Africanness' or 'African Renaissance' may be perceived differently; for example Orgeret (2004:152, 153, 155) perceives SABC Africa in the following ways: a result of an ongoing process of globalisation; a process where South Africa is promoting itself as the gatekeeper and gateway to Africa; and, on the other hand, notes that 'African Renaissance' is a narrow and exclusive realm of ethnicity. Oregeret (2004:155-157) mainly perceives SABC Africa to reflect an outward-looking perspective of African Renaissance as African unity, and an inward-looking perspective of the channel as the custodian of the national cultures and languages of South Africa. In Orgeret's view, African Renaissance and its associations with the SABC creates a division, first in terms of ethnicity (African versus European), and secondly in terms of the local and the global (South African versus African).

Musa Ndlovu (2003) believes that the expansion of SABC into the African regional media markets is indicative of South African media and cultural imperialism,²⁹ rather than of African Renaissance, whereby South African information and cultural norms are imposed on its African neighbours. In this way 'African Renaissance' can be viewed as the ideological manipulation by the corporations that control the means of communication, or the manipulation by other dominant and ideological groups, such as politicians, for example (Ndlovu 2003:302).

Even though the television channel brand may have many meanings and even if it appears difficult to determine the overall ideology of the channel, it is possible to identify various connotations, myths and ideologies. Dyer (1982:130) states that all images consist of "a number of 'floating' signs and [are] subject to a variety of interpretations" but that the ambiguity and contradictions in the image can be resolved by the linguistic message. The linguistic message in television branding can be a caption, headline, copy, tagline, slogan, dialogue or voiceover and this linguistic message limits the number of possible meanings the image might have by "inviting some interpretations rather than others" (Dyer 1982:130; Seiter 1992:44). The linguistic message thus "fixes the floating chain of signifieds in such a way as to counter the

²⁹ Ndlovu (2003:302) states that the concepts of media and cultural imperialism are analytical concepts used in the field of international communication to examine "the manner in which transnational media industries of the developed nations exercise dominance over the cultural/information sphere of their developing counterparts".

terror of uncertain signs”³⁰ (Dyer 1982:130). The linguistic message “aids identification and also connotes, backs up or secures the meaning intended” (Dyer 1982:130) thereby ‘anchoring’ the preferred reading or the meaning intended by the producer of the television channel brand (Barthes 1977:38-39).

The concept of ‘anchoring’ as introduced by Barthes (1977:38) is useful in an engagement with television channel branding where the images and graphics are often more abstract or symbolic and indexical rather than iconic.

In addition to anchoring, the linguistic message can also function as ‘relay’ where the caption, slogan or voiceover communicates what cannot be interpreted from the graphic images (Dyer 1977:41). Dyer (1982:30) notes that “[s]ometimes it is the linguistic message and not the image which predominates, and the image is used to ‘anchor’ an eye-catching but unspecific or puzzling caption”. ‘Relay’ thus describes the complementary relationship between the linguistic message and the image (Chandler 1999; Barthes 1977:41).

Whether it functions as an ‘anchor’ or a ‘relay’, the linguistic message is the definitive meaning of the image and the mechanism through which ideology operates; and can also be seen as the third level of meaning (Seiter 1992:44, Dyer 1982:130). Barthes (1977:40) states that the “anchorage may be ideological and indeed this is its principle functioning; the text directs the reader through the signifieds of the image, causing him to avoid some and receive others; by means of an often subtle *dispatching* it remote-controls him towards a meaning chosen in advance”.³¹

Whereas Fiske and Hartley (1978:43), O’Sullivan *et al* (1994:287) Dyer (1982:94) and Fourie and Karam (2001:475) generally regard myth as the second-order signification and ideology as the third, Chandler (1999) places both myth and ideology in the third-order of signification (with connotation at the second level and denotation at the first). Both views may be accurate, as well as the view that denotation may be regarded as the first level, connotation as the second, myth as the third and ideology regarded as an additional fourth level. What does seem to be clear, is that the meaning, as it

³⁰ Dyer (1982:130) cites from Barthes’s (1977:37) “The rhetoric of the image” published in *Image/Music/Text* translated by Stephen Heath. “The rhetoric of the image” was originally published in *The responsibility of forms: critical essays on music, art and representation* written by Barthes in 1964 and translated by Richard Howard in 1985.

³¹ This quote of Barthes (1977:40) is also cited by Seiter (1992:44).

progresses from the first level to the third (or fourth) becomes increasingly elusive and subjective.

The layered structure of meaning with its various levels (as represented in Figure 13) is a useful manner to approach the interpretation of television channel brands. Chapter Four will first explore the first- and second-orders of signification (denotation and connotation) followed by an exploration of the myth and ideology (the third- and fourth-orders of signification) of each SABC television channel brand as they appear on screen.

This chapter explored the signs, codes and meanings of brands and television channel brands in particular. It also explored the structural elements of signs, codes and meaning as they relate to branding. The next section explores the similarities between the structural frameworks for the process of ideology, semiosis and branding which may provide a clearer indication of the manner in which television channel branding operates.

3.7 The structural framework for the process of ideology, semiosis and branding

This section advocates the semiotic analysis of branding (and specifically television branding) as a process of communication that carries ideologies which are culturally located. It is also possible to compare the manner in which the process of semiosis, branding and ideology work, and to demonstrate it structurally. Julie Reid (2004:53) notes that there are five levels in which the process of semiosis occurs (Figure 14).

The producers of signs are situated in the first level (Figure 14, top level). She explains that the signs on the third level of semiosis are produced by combining the signifier and the signified located on the second level (Reid 2004:53). The fourth level of semiosis is the level at which the sign is received by the reader, and the sign is then interpreted by the reader to determine what is signified by the signifier on the fifth level (Reid 2004:52-53).

Producer of sign	
Signifier	Signified
Sign	
Readers of the sign	
Reading produced is similar to the intended meaning of the producer of the sign	Aberrant reading is produced

Figure 14: The process of semiosis.
(Reid 2004:52.)

This model of the process of semiosis (as shown in Figure 14) can be applied to branding as a specific instance of semiosis (Figure 15) with the creation, reception and interpretation of the signs and codes expressed through corporate identity. The producer of the sign, and also the sender of the communicated message, is the brand proprietor. In the case of this study, the brand proprietor is the SABC television channel. The brand proprietor, or SABC television channel, makes use of specific signifiers, such as brand names, logos, idents, or even colour, for example, to signify the brand values of the television channels, and ultimately the SABC organisation. The collective use of signifiers such as logos, letterheads, idents, colour, advertisements, photographs, symbols, continuity presenters, music – even the buildings and sets – all communicate the organisations values, and collectively establish the television channel’s brand identity.

Brand proprietor (SABC)	
Brand name	Brand values
Brand identity	
Stakeholders (viewers & advertisers)	
Brand image in the mind of receiver is similar to brand identity sent by brand proprietor	Aberrant reading is produced (Culture jammers)

Figure 15: The process of branding.
(Author’s representation.)

The stakeholders, or television channel viewers and potential advertisers, read and interpret this brand identity sent by the organisation or television channel. If the brand identity is successful, the interpretation or brand image in the mind of the receivers

(viewers and advertisers) is similar to the brand identity sent by the producer or brand proprietor (SABC television channel). If the viewers or receivers cannot identify with the brand image perceived, an oppositional or aberrant reading might be produced by them, such as the anti-corporate imagery which emerged during the 1990s (Klein 2000). Klein (2000:448) notes that the counter-messages by culture jammers are not necessarily opposite meanings, but rather aim to uncover “the deeper truth hiding between the layers of advertising euphemisms”.

Good branding principles would include an exploration of such counter-messages (Spark 2004b:66-67). It might also be necessary for the producer or brand proprietor to re-evaluate the organisation’s values, and to come up with new ways to communicate such renewed values through a revised brand identity.

From the discussion regarding brands in sections 3.3 and 3.4 it becomes clear that brands can be regarded as economic events or entities that form part of the base, and also that brands are social events or cultural artefacts belonging to the superstructure. As previously stated, Classical Marxist theory asserts that it is the material or economic base which determines the superstructure, or that the economic base is the organising factor of human society. Klein (2000) indicates, however, that the superstructure also influences the base, where culture jammers and “adbusters” communicate their dissent of the exploitation of sweatshop labourers. Brands in the twenty-first century permeate both the base and superstructure. A successful brand invests in the symbiotic relationship between base and superstructure, economics and culture. The economic base and the production of brands influence the superstructure and culture. In turn, the cultural aspects of brands influence the economic base. It is a continuous process of communication that re-creates the meaning of brands.

The process of semiosis (shown in Figure 14) as it operates within branding (shown in Figure 15) reveals a structural similarity to the process of ideology (Figure 16). In this study, the dominant group is considered to be the SABC and its organisational ties with the ANC government.³² The producers of each SABC television channel brand, for example the general managers and brand managers, are part of this dominant group

³² ANC member Thabo Mbeki was the South African president from 14 June 1999 to 24 September 2008, and it appears logical that many of the country’s policies and rhetoric informed by the Mbeki’s presidency will also inform the organisation of the SABC during the time period covered in this dissertation (2000-2009).

(Figure 16, top level). These producers are part of the first level of semiosis, and they commission manufactured designs and “signs that are imbued with the ideological meaning that is injected into them by the downward pressures of the dominant ideological group” (Reid 2004:53).

The SABC Africa channel branding, as shown earlier in this chapter (Figures 4-8; 12), is an ideological text (Figure 16, level three) imbued with ideological messages (Figure 16, level two). The ideological state apparatus, in this example, is the SABC who conveys such ideological messages in support of the idea of an African renaissance (Figure 16, level two). This occurs due to downward pressure on the ideological state apparatus (SABC and its managers) from the dominant ideological group (or ANC government and its support for Thabo Mbeki). Individual members of society may accept the idea of African renaissance as propagated by SABC Africa, in which case a dominant or negotiated reading of SABC Africa branding may occur and hegemony is achieved (level four and five of Figure 16).

Dominant ideological group	
Ideological State Apparatus	Ideological message
Ideological text	
Individual members of society	
Dominant or negotiated reading	Oppositional reading

Figure 16: The societal structure of a dominant political ideology.
(Reid 2004:54.)

Oppositional readings may result in a resistance to the ideologies propagated by the ISA, which in turn may contribute to resistance or opposition to the dominant ideological group in general. It is thus in the best interest of the dominant ideological group to minimise the possibility of oppositional readings and to adjust the ideological texts to be inclusive of all members so that hegemony can be achieved. The three illustrations in this section (Figures 14-16) therefore indicate that the structures for the process of semiosis and the process of branding as they are explored in this chapter are similar to the process of ideology explored in Chapter Two.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter dealt with some basic concepts regarding semiotics and corporate identity. The chapter created an interdisciplinary link between semiotic theory and theory on brands and branding, and explored the parallel development towards theory that increasingly emphasises the importance of the reader, consumer or viewer. Chapter Three also underlined the communicative process of branding and indicated that the producer/brand, proprietor/sender and the consumer/stakeholder/receiver are situated within a distinct position within this communication process or semiosis of branding. The communicative process of branding was structurally compared with the process of semiosis, and the structural framework of both branding and semiosis shows a similarity to the structural framework of a dominant political ideology. Chapter Three thus explored the theoretical underpinnings of semiotics, branding or corporate identity and television channel branding. The following chapter explores the visual examples of television branding from each SABC channel. The theory from Chapters Two and Three is applied in Chapter Four in order to examine the visual brand identities of SABC1, SABC2 and SABC3.