Style, *Tsotsi*-style, and *Tsotsitaal*

The Histories, Aesthetics, and Politics of a South African Figure

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Anyone familiar with contemporary South African popular culture is also familiar with the scandal and success of Teboho Mahlatsi's and Angus Gibson's *Yizo Yizo* (meaning "this is it/this is the real thing"), a television serial about a group of township youths who are attempting to negotiate the competing demands and opportunities of school and criminality.[1] Broadcast between 1999 and 2004, *Yizo Yizo* offered South Africans an unprecedentedly frank depiction of youthful life in a space familiar to many but largely unrepresented in the public space of cinema except as a backdrop for dramas centered elsewhere.[2] This is a world where violence seems to be, as Michael Herr once said of the war in Vietnam, the primary means of masculine self-regeneration.[3]

What marked the innovation of *Yizo Yizo* was the realism with which it approached social life in townships *after* the end of apartheid, and its embrace of a linguistic hybridity rarely before accommodated in South African cinema or television.[4] Equally important, however, was the show's refiguring of the relationship between crime and the political. The sense of purposelessness that afflicts so many of the characters in the series, and which both infuses the violence and threatens the daily lives of even the most upright characters, offers a disquieting counterpoint to the euphoric narratives of national renewal that proliferated during this same period in other spaces of the official public sphere. In this respect, the series shares something with the tonality of cinema noir in its classical era, when, following World War II, a sense of political ennui overwhelmed both the heroic narratives of an earlier era comfortable with the moral certitudes

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of militarism, and the antiheroism of gangster films, which offered the law of the underworld as a mirror and alternative to that of legitimated authoritarianism. This refiguring of the relationship between crime and the political also entailed a reproblematization of the politics of style, a critical project that had first been taken up by South African writers, and which had then been extended in filmic form, most notably in Oliver Schmitz and Thomas Mogotlane's *Mapantsula* (1988) and, more recently, in the film that Schmitz made in collaboration with the poet Lesego Rampolokeng, called *Hijack Stories* (2005).

At the center of these distinct televisual and cinematic explorations of the aesthetico-political dimension in South Africa is the figure of the *tsotsi*. At once an icon and a cipher, a neologism and the sign of linguistic slippage, the *tsotsi* is a carnal image of desire unleashed from the boundaries of ideologically contained consumerism. In and through this figure one can discern the fugitive traces of the material and ideological processes by which transnational capital entered into South African worlds, soliciting new kinds of masculinity even as it was offering imaginal forms through which more or less contained resistance could express itself. The historical arc of the *tsotsi* traverses a period that opens at the beginning of apartheid and stretches into the space of its immediate aftermath. If we tend to think of apartheid as the era defined by a relatively if not purely coercive state apparatus, a reading of the *tsotsi* perhaps permits some recognition that this period also saw the development of something else. Indeed, the apartheid era is usefully understood (among other things) as the period in which the settler colonial state learned of and accommodated itself to the need for supplementation by the desiring machinery of the mass media, which it awkwardly appropriated, first through the institution of censorship and then through carefully controlled production, but always in a manner that was intended to sustain a racially differentiated relationship to consumption.[5]

The *tsotsi* is not an artifact of the South African effort to achieve hegemony, however; it is, rather, the ambivalent sign of a failure in such efforts, as well as in the practices of oppositionality directed against it.[6] Moreover, the *tsotsi* is comprehensible only as the product of a complex and recursive circuit along which forms and objects of desire and conceptions of the possible have migrated: from the United States and Britain, via Europe, to South Africa, along the networks of indigenous language traditions, and back to the United States, through the spaces of racialized subalternity (African American and Latino), and back . . . and so forth.[7] In this essay, I consider the history and contemporary life of this figure, and suggest that the recent return of the *tsotsi* in films like *Tsotsi* (2005), *Hijack Stories*, and, most recently, *Jerusalema* (2008) as well as in television series like *Yizo Yizo* and *Gaz'lam* discloses much about the problematic

relationship between political transformation, ideology, and consumerism in South Africa, with *Hijack Stories* offering the most plangent and self-conscious critique of the place of cinema in these processes. Here, I offer a history of the *tsotsi* that opens onto considerations of the relationships between cinema and other media forms (print, radio, sound recording, and so forth), all of which, I argue, participate in a structure of overhearing. Overhearing is enabled by broadcast media (which are never contained by direct address), and by the fact that intentionality and actual signification are always discontinuous from each other. My purpose is to consider how and why the *tsotsi*—the figure through whom style lays claim to the political—arose as a media effect via the practices of overhearing, and to conclude by reflecting on why this effect remained so contained in and by a masculinist conception of, and will to, power.

Tsotsi: What Is in a Name?

For filmgoers outside of South Africa, the word *tsotsi* is largely associated with the film *Tsotsi* (2005), Gavin Hood's unctuous, eponymously titled feature about a young thug who inadvertently drives off with the infant child of a woman whom he has carjacked in the suburb. It is the kind of suburb that is now home to the emergent black bourgeoisie, enabled by South Africa's Black Economic Empowerment policy, and what partly ensnares the young thug is his failure to recognize that this space is a social world and not simply a locus for the accumulation of goods (the film is largely focalized from within that world).[8] Indeed, *Tsotsi* marks the point where the demand for politicization has given way to the narrative of moralization within a structure of heteronormative family values. But however contemporary are the referents of the film's mise-en-scène, the figure of the *tsotsi* is a return: the mark of an older form's restitution and resignification after apartheid's end, and after the momentary displacement of crime by politics and by the complex phenomenon of "politically legitimate violence" that defined the last moments of the "Struggle." Within South Africa, the term denotes the outlaw, urban tough, or gangster, who aspires to appear in the form made recognizable through cinema (and its remediations in photo comics, magazines, and popular fiction). *Tsotsi* connotes black male sovereignty in its most unencumbered form, and if the term always bears with it a specific if nonetheless constantly changing set of visual associations, it also bears the unmistakable aura of violence. For this reason, because of its insistent and brutal carnality, I want to shy away from any insinuation that the return of this figure entails an aspect of the uncanny or that its logic is that of the *revenant*. The *tsotsi*, we might say, is the figure that constantly resists the spectralizing effects of commodification, that disavows the deferral that is the

condition of possibility of that commodification, and that's relentless consumption ridicules both the logic of accumulation and the ethos of self-restraint which is its flip side. Before anything else, however, the *tsotsi* is a word and has its origins in a word. It entered the polylinguistic space of urban South Africa sometime in the early 1940s.

According to Peter Davis, it is derived from the term *zoot suit*, which was popularized by Cab Calloway, the stylish American jazz singer of Cotton Club fame.[9] The term began to circulate widely following the screenings of the largely black American film musical *Stormy Weather* (1943), in which Calloway starred, and it became entrenched after *Cabin in the Sky* (1943) was shown in black theaters in South Africa between 1945 and 1950. Calloway was himself a figure and enabler (one wants to say medium) of translation. His *New Cab Calloway's Hepsters Dictionary: Language of Jive* offered more naive listeners as well as would-be aficionados a lexicon of jazz idioms and the means to perform subcultural knowingness. The readers of his 1944 guide to hipness could find in its pages all the terms with which to avoid the appearance of unfashionability: from those for excitement ("blow your wig") and possession ("lock up") to those for fashion. The last entry of the *Dictionary* is that for *zoot suit*, which is defined, quite simply, as "the ultimate in clothes. The only totally and truly American civilian suit." Nonetheless, a question remains as to how Calloway's zoot suit became a *tsotsi* after it arrived in South Africa. And this question has to be posed in two registers, the first at the level of language, the second at the level of genre. For the *tsotsi* entered into black popular culture in South Africa not only through linguistic slippage and appropriation, as we shall see, but via the traversal of genre thresholds; it migrated away from the jazz musical, where it was cathected to the idea and the image of both black cultural production and autonomous pleasure, while accreting the signs and some of the political resonances more properly associated with the typically white genres of gangster film and, even more powerfully, noir cinema. Let me begin to seek answers to that doubled question with a consideration of language.

Before assuming its fully vernacular form in South Africa as *tsotsi*, the zoot suit had to find its indigenous echo, for vernacularization is not merely a vectoral transfer; it is the mode within which foreignness (in this case capitalist modernity and the consumerism it demands) is materialized locally. There is, in fact, some evidence that the word *tsotsi* may have derived from the South Sotho (Sepedi) word *ho tsotsa*, meaning "to sharpen," and that it referred to the shape of the trousers that gave the zoot suit its particular mark.[10] But *tsotsi* was not and is not reducible to fashion, despite the fact that it embodies the logic by which fashion can signify other things. The *tsotsi* was emphatically associated with masculine violence, personal autonomy, and unfettered mobility—everything

apartheid withheld from black subjects. In this sense, the term came to supplant older words associated with criminality and violence, at the point where criminality was assuming the dimensions of style, and in the moment when the state's capacity to intervene in intimate social life was reaching its apogee. Its emergence in the mid-1940s took place against the backdrop of an increasingly elaborate set of legislative gestures aimed at securing white rule through segregation. The Native Urban Areas Act of 1923 instituted the pass system, limiting black movement between urban and homeland locations, which was extended in 1952 with the Pass Laws Act. In the two years immediately following the election of the National Party in 1948, legislation prohibiting interracial relation (Prohibition of Interracial Marriage Act, 1949; and Immorality Act, 1950) and communism (Suppression of Communism Act, 1950) was promulgated along with the Group Areas Act, which effectively territorialized racial and ethnolinguistic difference, while formalizing the strategy for maintaining uneven development so central to all capitalist formations in their imperial moments.[11] Such was the moment of the *tsotsi*'s appearance.

It is interesting, in this context, to note the great South African writer Es'kia Mphalele's remarks that, in the 1930s, the thugs who plagued Marabastad, near Pietersberg where he lived, were called *malaita* in Sotho. They were also noted for their violence and their style (Mphalele always accompanies their mention with a description, in the first instance observing their "shorts, tennis caps, tennis shoes and handkerchiefs dangling from their pockets").[12] Significantly, however, the word *malaita* was not yet itself a term for style, did not yet connote a particular iconicity. In Mphalele's autobiography, the *malaita* still had to be described. Hence, to the extent that that word *tsotsi* was indeed anchored in an already extant Sotho lexicon, it was performing a new function, namely, the coalescence of style and violence, fashion and criminality. And it was this newly signifying term that proliferated, leaking from cinema into the lived world, although it would do so increasingly via the mediations of other media.

Whether the result of a homonymy produced by transliteration or an iconicity translated into Sepedi (Northern Sotho), the *tsotsi* went from an unprecedented neologism to a widely circulating idiom in a few short years. Unknown before 1943–44, it had broad subcultural resonance by the end of the decade, by which point it had also become relatively associated with urban youth.[13] Thus, by 1951, C. V. Bothma could refer to the *tsotsi* as the index of a "society of the adolescent."[14] And government reports could blame violent crime in the mines of the Witwatersrand in 1949 and 1950 on "outside agitators, intimidation, irresponsible press reports—and . . . a '*tsotsi* reign of terror' and the evil effects of 'bioscope films.'"[15] The historical conditions of possibility for the *tsotsi*'s emergence far exceed the matter of fortuitously sonic echoes, of course. The effects of the new

legislation, the familial breakdown associated with migrant labor, and the cramped conditions of township life all conspired to generate an environment in which the street became the playground of youth.[16] In this milieu, the value of fashionability suffused not merely clothing but language as well. *Tsotsitaal,* the name given to the creolized slang of the *tsotsi*s in the townships (where otherwise distinct ethnolinguistic communities confronted each other), was a significant element of the subculture in the 1940s and 1950s. As Clive Glaser puts it, "subcultural status was attached to speaking the language with flair and dexterity, to familiarity with the latest nuances and innovations." Moreover, dialects of different townships were admired or reviled by speakers of others.[17] In other words, *tsotsitaal* was language in the mode of style.

An Eye for an Ear: Overhearing and Film Reception in South Africa

The space into which Calloway arrived was defined not only by the dominance of a particular cinematic aesthetic but also by the suffusion of public culture by the narrative tropes of radio drama and a popular press dominated as much by print journalism and photo comics as by any other form. Although radio was merely twenty years old, by the war years of the 1940s, Gertrude Stein's observation of "everybody really everybody listening to the radio" applied almost as much to South Africa as to France. Inaugurated by the South African Railways in 1923, South African radio was divided among three distinct interests until 1927, when they were incorporated as the African Broadcasting Company and, following a commission of inquiry called by General James Hertzog (prime minister of South Africa from 1924 to 1939), came under the authority of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). The SABC was broadcasting in both English and Afrikaans by 1936 and producing scores of hours of programming each week, including not only news and sports but cultural programs featuring literary readings and radio drama. Of course, these radio broadcasts emanated from within the dominant languages and were received by indigenous South Africans primarily in the manner of overhearing. One could say that this overhearing enabled the discernment in cinematic jazz musicals of possibilities not intended, and of significations unimagined by their makers and the censors who authorized their screening. In any case, the exuberant stylishness that characterized films like *Stormy Weather* and *Cabin in the Sky* had to be liberated and autonomized before it could be made to bear the connotations of sovereignty, and before it could make any claim upon the political.

Let me pause here to remark, in the shadow of James Siegel's exemplary work (whence comes this concept), that *overhearing* refers to that kind of audition which occurs when language is apprehended by someone to whom

it is not directed.[18] It occurs wherever the circuit of mass-mediated transmission permits listening at a distance, and it is especially potent when it occurs in contexts defined by a hierarchy of languages, such that an auditor is able to hear something in a language which is not his or her own, or when the speaker imagines the circuit of reception as a closed one, but when a listener who is imagined as outside the circuit is nonetheless able to "eavesdrop." In colonial contexts defined by the rule of a foreign language, or in contexts where the language of a privileged minority governs, it is often assumed that native speakers of native languages will not attend to what is spoken even in their presence by the bearers of power. The domestic servant, in particular, is archetypically figured as one who may overhear the conversations of the household, but who will not attend them except when the colonizer requires or desires it. Here the colonial fantasy conceives of the unaddressed but listening presence as a mere medium for the communicative needs of power. Thus, even when the servant's task is that of translator and mediator, it is usually assumed that she or he hears only what is intended for reception. Indeed the colonial fantasy of a closed communicative circuit rests on the tight conflation of intention with reception, and on the presumption that the will of the one issuing commandments will be transmitted transparently and with full effectivity. Hence, the only circumstances in which this tacit and coerced agreement to not listen can be violated are those of threat to the colonial household. Here, overhearing and inadvertent witnessing are conflated. A case in point can be found in the early South African film *The Kaffir's Gratitude* (1916), in which a black servant not only sees his *baas*'s neighbor trying to steal land but also witnesses the fiendish usurper's efforts to abduct his *baas*'s wife. In this case, the servant's "overhearing" of the event allows him to rush off and communicate the news to his *baas*, who is then able to save his wife and restore his land.[19]

The Kaffir's Gratitude represents the fantasy of a closed communicative world, one in which natives are mere media for the agonistic relations between colonizing subjects and where the prospect of re-appropriation by the colonized is not yet thinkable. It is the kind of world in which orders can be given in a language of imperatives with false Africanizing suffixes, in which the mere appearance of translation will transmit the force of a colonial will and demonstrate the fact that colonial language is the locus of power.[20] Such was the case with *funagalo*, the language born in the mines—artificial even as lingua franca—to facilitate both mine management and management's monolingualism. In *The Kaffir's Gratitude*, the potentially traumatic event is observed and transmitted without leakage. And one hardly needs to remark that the fantasy belongs to an authority incapable of imagining itself as the object of critical scrutiny; the film itself had an exclusively white audience in mind. However, by the time of Calloway's zoot-suit-wearing escapades, film spectatorship in South Africa had

become a much more complex enterprise, and imperialism had become settler colonialism.

Black audiences in South Africa were initially solicited into spectatorship from within two distinct and competing projects, both of which sought to cultivate sensibilities appropriate to industrial modernity, both of which were Christian in origin and orientation. The first of these, established by Sol Plaatjie, entailed traveling "bioscopes" featuring educational documentaries, particularly those produced in the United States about "New Negroes" under the auspices of Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute. The second, initiated by Reverend Ray Phillips of the American Board of Missionaries, who had advocated the moralization of leisure time, accommodated feature-length narrative films, providing that they did not depict whites in ethically compromised acts.[21] Exemplarity was the guiding principle of both Plaatjie's and Phillips's film projects, but it was the specular pleasure afforded by narrative film that drew audiences. Accordingly, state censorship would henceforth be dominated by efforts to determine which kinds of pleasures were threatening to racialism and hence subject to repression.[22] The logic was one that attributed to black South Africans an especially acute aptitude for and tendency toward mimesis. Accordingly, it was the spectacle of violence that was most vigorously withheld, particularly the violence associated with the Hollywood genres of the gangster film and film noir.[23] Seeing was here less associated with believing than becoming, and that because it also entailed hearing or, rather, overhearing.

From Black Jazz to Film Noir

Peter Davis makes much of the fact that the first all-black South African films to repudiate the iconic image of the faithful servant are known as much for the musical achievements of their stars as the narrative power of the films. *Jim Comes to Joburg* (1949) and *Come Back, Africa* (1959) launched, respectively, the careers of Dolly Rathebe (known as the South African Billie Holiday)[24] and Miriam Makeba. *Jim Comes to Joburg* is a somewhat sentimental and exceedingly mild rendition of rural breakdown and migrant labor, one in which the *tsotsi*s appear menacing but of dubious authority, and where the fact of forced migrant labor was left off camera. But it established the *shebeen* as the mise-en-scène for a kind of overhearing in which not only the musical talents of its stars but also the political discoursing of working people and the black underclasses could be encountered. This development would prove crucial for the transformations that would enable the *tsotsi* to migrate in status and significance, as it traversed the boundaries between the genre of jazz cinema and gangster film as well as film noir. In fact, it redoubled a possibility that was being staged in noir itself.

We can see a particularly potent instance of this emergent trajectory in the classic Hollywood film noir *D.O.A.* (1950), the mesmerizing, temporally convoluted tale of a man, Frank Bigelow, who is poisoned and who must investigate his own murder. At the narrative center of the film is the discovery of the event that will lead to Bigelow's demise. He is poisoned while at a jazz club, where the black ensemble led by Jean-Baptiste "Illinois" Jacquet is playing, and where the white audience members appear to be verily possessed by the music. Indeed, it is the music that transforms the bar into an iconic location for the mortal metamorphosis, the drug being described by the doctor as a "luminous toxin," the scene itself being submerged in darkness (but haunted by wraiths of cigarette smoke). However, the importance of *D.O.A.* does not lie in the mere fact that the jazz bar becomes a token of the illicit or illegitimate (though that occurs repeatedly in white representations of the period) so much as it lies in the film's rendering of the mise-en-scène as the locus for the hyperbolic investment of surfaces and, on this basis, for a reading practice that constantly attempts to refer beyond those surfaces. It is precisely this kind of reading practice that noir promotes and depends upon. And this same reading practice allows for style to claim political significance. Moving from the jazz musical to the film noir, by virtue of the encompassment by noir of the jazz scene, the zoot suit, even that worn by Calloway, thus becomes available for a retroactive signification and valorization, a gesture that would be made both in South Africa and in the United States. Let me then consider what it was about gangster and noir film that may have lent itself to being taken up as it was, and that enabled the resignification of the zoot suit in the self-stylization of the *tsotsi*.

Often represented as a specifically American invention, film noir is also invariably narrated as an exemplary instance of genre formation in the space of translocal political and aesthetic economies. Although unstable as a definitional term, the always untranslated *noir* names a kind of aesthetic that derives its identity as much from the circuits of migration and intellectual exchange across the Atlantic as from the particular cultural forms dominant in the United States during and immediately following World War II. Thus, if its iconic instances emerged in Hollywood, noir is also associated with the influx of European directors to the United States, many of whom appeared to have been influenced by German expressionism or, by virtue of being German, partook of the cultural milieu that produced it. Most of its dominant aesthetic elements—high contrasts, distorted and underlit undergrounds, low and indirect camera angles, hallucinatory but obstructed mise-en-scènes, temporal discontinuities and flashbacks—had defined an earlier moment of European cinema. If these aesthetic elements were at least partially inherited from abroad, the achievement of genre status was also dependent upon recognition from the Continent, and

especially from that community of critics whose intellectual and artistic projects had overlapped with the two postwar modes of French philosophical radicalism, namely surrealism (after World War I) and existentialism (after World War II).[25] Or so classical film history would have it.

In recent years, this "origin myth," as Paul Young terms it, has been called into question.[26] Edward Dimendberg, for example, notes the minority status (in numerical terms) of the émigré directors and insists that noir is a split and internally differentiated phenomenon in which national traditions and historical developments are linked to locally specific transformations of modernity, and the particular spatialities produced within each. Thus, for example, he notes that in Fritz Lang's *M* (1931), the city is threatening because peopled by crowds, whose mobile forms and propensity to metamorphose into vindictive mobs terrorize both the guilty and the innocent. In the U.S. films most often categorized as properly noir, it is less the claustrophobia and vertical enclosure of the old city than the vacant warehouses and desolate suburban landscapes that provide the mise-en-scène for their ambiguous plotlines and the consciousness of exposure to danger.

Dimendberg's reading of spatiality as a symptom of modernity's own internal differentiation represents a transformation but also a certain continuity with the long-standing arguments about noir's historical provenance in film studies.[27] It has been variously conceived as a genre and a style, but most critics agree that noir evolved from the gangster film, though its mood is more somber, more cynical. Crucially, of course, the gangster film staged a nearly symmetrical battle between the world of organized crime and the organized world of legality, but, in the end, law and order triumphs despite the enormously seductive aura that was often attributed to the gangsters. Noir abandoned that certitude, though not the lure of crime. Its criminal is as likely to be the hero and to escape the law as to be subject to its force. And the representatives of justice are as likely to be as venal as any gangster. But more than a matter of who triumphs, noir developed as what Tom Conley calls a "cinema of cruelty."[28]

Within the frame, remarks Conley, noir offers unprecedented spectacles of sadism and sexual regression. However, its aesthetic operations cannot be grasped only through reference to the visible—however elaborate the mise-en-scène. As Conley puts it, "the visual constriction articulates a space *off* to convey the severities of the limits determining what is *on*."[29] The result is a single coterminous world, in which viewer and narrative are enveloped in a single space, one in which narrative and allegory sustain each other. Reading the moment of Robert Siodmak's *Criss Cross* (1949) in which Slim Dundee, having murdered the lovers, hears a siren from offscreen and is shocked into consciousness of the world of consequentiality, Conley writes,

> the sirens *off* have imaginary origins in the viewer's space. Rhetorically, it is *we* who come to arraign or to murder the murderer. . . . the death is envisioned as the conflation of space along a 180-degree sightline. At the one end are the lovers on a couch before a window looking onto infinity, while at the threshold arrives the figure of Death aligned with the spectator's point of view. Beyond the frame, in the theater we become the Law. We assign the ultimate order in both narrative and cinematic terms.[30]

The tendency of noir films to reference the extrafilmic historical context through objects and textual scraps from the environment, says Conley, makes these films incitements to reading even though this reading also requires a certain abandonment of the perspectival illusionism that would have granted the filmic narrative its hallucinatory autonomy.[31] Hence the allegorical power of noir so noted by those who wish to see in it an oblique critical discourse, a "Marxism manqué," to use Mike Davis's idiom, or a politics of "style" in Dick Hebdige's.[32] The burden of such allegory is, of course, that the viewer must judge the veracity of the extrafilmic referents and determine whether they function to anchor the film in a particular moment or merely signify the metavalue of historicity per se, thereby lending themselves to an ironic mythification in which the past becomes a style of pastness. The latter phenomenon is discernible in the obsequious remakes of noir films such as Steven Soderbergh's *The Good German* (2007), wherein the historical referent is less a moment or event than a poster for a film produced in relation to a moment (in this case *Casablanca*). Here, style lifts off from the story to the extent of blunting the narrative, such that stylishness becomes the primary signified of the style, pastness the referent of the period costume.

We might add to Conley's incisive reading a recognition that this kind of operation, insofar as it constantly points outward to a space beyond the screen, also works to evoke and perform secrecy. The visible always becomes both an object of fascination and a sign of something elsewhere. Often enough, this is reduplicated within the narratives of noir films—as in the case of the microfilm hidden in a purse and stolen in *Pickup on South Street* (1953), or the letter that may incriminate or exculpate the wife of the plantation owner in Billy Wilder's *The Letter* (1940). But equally important is the fact that these objects, functioning as ciphers whose surfaces are visible but whose interior significance remains unseen, point to even more profound secrets—communist conspiracies, nuclear nightmares, miscegenation, illicit affairs, and so forth. Token images of secrecy, then, these figures open onto a multiplying and receding set of other secrets in a form of mise en abyme, one that imbues these films with an ethos of radical doubt and a tendency toward conspiratorial fantasy.

It is, in this context, significant that the first major noir film actually

shot in South Africa was a remake of the film recognized by so many as the last of the noir films of the classical Hollywood tradition: *Pickup on South Street*. Directed by Samuel Fuller, *Pickup on South Street* tells the story of a petty criminal, Skip McCoy, who inadvertently steals a microfilm from the purse of a young woman, Candy. Neither she nor the thief initially knows the nature of the film, which she is delivering quite innocently to her boyfriend, who nonetheless works as a communist. McCoy quickly becomes the object of both communist conspirators and U.S. federal agents, not to mention the local police. Unswayed by nationalist sentiment or ideological commitment, however, he holds on to his contraband once he grasps its nature, and offers it to whoever can pay his price. The violent confrontation to which the desperation of all sides leads produces neither retribution nor justice; McCoy gets away with his theft, the police are proven incapable of maintaining order, and the communist threat continues to loom off scene as a perpetual horizon.

In 1967, Robert D. Webb slavishly remade *Pickup on South Street* in South Africa as *Cape Town Affair* for Killarney Studios, Twentieth Century-Fox's South African subsidiary, which distributed it only to white audiences.[33] As Joseph Heumann and Robin Murray have pointed out, the anticommunism of the apartheid regime, which identified the politics of African nationalism with communism and both Soviet and Chinese socialism, provided a perfect milieu in which to receive the Fuller text.[34] The communist in the film is played by an Asian man—the only nonwhite in the entire film other than a nanny who appears only briefly. If it is true that South African anticommunism shared something with the American paranoia of the immediate postwar years, Heumann and Murray's analysis of the mise-en-scène, including the portraits of Hendrick Vervoerd (prime minister from 1958 to 1966) adorning the precinct walls, makes clear that the film's narrative continuity with its antecedent text nonetheless required the elaboration of a space coterminous with an exterior world quite distinct from its American counterpart. The proliferation of local referents through the elaboration of the film's surface details was accompanied by other aesthetic departures (beyond the shift from black and white to color), almost all of them observable in the opening sequences. Where *Pickup* was cast in darkness, enclosed in claustrophobic interiors, its camera angles dominated by low angles, *Cape Town Affair* is suffused in light, its porous interiors constantly opening onto a cleansed urban space of assertive order, its camera angles frequently providing the viewer with commanding vistas and the illusion of oversight. Although *Cape Town Affair* was withheld from black audiences, the moral ambiguity of the film and the white disavowal of white law making it appear too incendiary, the film works to contain much of the critical potential of noir by dispersing its elements. Perhaps the most potent marker of that containment is in the

music and orchestration, for it is here that blackness is most repressed, blackness having become as associated in South Africa with jazz as it was in the United States.[35]

In *Pickup*, the hard, brassy sounds and percussive movements of Leigh Harline's orchestration accompany credits on a flat screen, signifying with their dissonant tones a mood of anxiety. They stop abruptly with the action, giving way to the ambient sounds of the subway. *Cape Town Affair* opens with credits over aerial shots of the foreshore and the movement of traffic along its broad boulevards. The music of Bob Adams and Joe Kentridge is anything but anxious, a single acoustic base, a cymbal, and a voluptuous tenor sax giving way to fuller orchestration, which nonetheless moves with erotic languor until the repetition of its one melodic line begins to acquire a driving force, which plays over the entire initial robbery scene. Better known for his work with Disney (he won an Oscar for "When You Wish upon a Star"), Harline's score was hardly as abrasive or discordant as Jacquet's in *D.O.A.*, but the lushness of Adams and Kentridge's new orchestration worked to contain even the modest anxieties provoked in *Pickup* with the promise of resolution.

The Politicization of Style

By the time of *Cape Town Affair*, some twenty years into the apartheid era, at least two distinct trajectories had emerged in South Africa from noir and its suturing with jazz, trajectories that are irreducible to racial difference even as they run along paths made by the logic of apartheid. On the one hand are strategies of containment—including the dispersal of noir elements in forms of citation that decathect them from narratives associated with the failure of law, and the evacuation of music that signifies unrestrained blackness. On the other hand is the autonomization of a style and a stylishness associated with both jazz and gangsterism, but conjoined with the values of personal sovereignty, consumerism, and ironic distance from legality often associated with noir. This latter trajectory owes itself to two factors, including the development of other media forms in which the figure of the gangster, now a *tsotsi*, was autonomized and enabled to appear in other contexts, and the migration between the United States and South Africa of other significations of the zoot suit.

One could imagine that the chasm separating American urban life, as depicted by Hollywood, would have had little resonance for black South Africans largely confined to impoverished periurban locations and artificially sustained rural homelands. Moreover, if classic noir answered to the demand of social criticism with style, as Paul Schrader says, while also illuminating the moral and political bankruptcy of postwar society, it nonetheless did so by mobilizing the metaphoricity of white dominance.

As Charles Scruggs so deftly remarks, "*Noir* may have pioneered Hollywood's unprecedently merciless exposure of white pathology, but by relying on race to convey that pathology it in effect erected a *cordon sanitaire* around the circle of corruption it sought to penetrate. Film *noir* rescues with racial idioms the whites whose moral and social boundaries seem so much in doubt. 'Black film' is the refuge of whiteness."[36] Hence, the uptake of noir by black readers and audiences (even if only in the mediated forms by which it appeared in other media) required a disassembling of its constituent elements if it was not to produce a crisis of identification. But that disassembling also permitted the intensification of noir's mannerism, and the reification of its forms as signs of Americanness. Thus, in the writings of *Drum* magazine and in popular cultural production of the 1950s and 1960s, more generally, a general Americophilia is widely visible. In them, as Njabulo Ndebele remarks, one encounters "characters speaking like Americans, dressing like Americans, and driving American cars." Such derivativeness nonetheless expressed the "growing confidence" of "sophisticated urban working and petty bourgeois classes."[37] *Drum* combined within its pages a combination of political analysis and entertainment, becoming the most widely read, nationally disseminated venue for black writing and criticism and a primary venue for the emergent figures of the black intelligentsia. It was also the primary venue for the development of crime reportage and detective fiction characterized by the aestheticization of violence. Indeed, it was this latter dimension (what he described as the arbitrary standards of *Drum*) that made Es'kia Mphahlele skeptical of even working for the magazine, though he admired the investigative journalism of its renowned contributor Henry Nxumalo and, during his reluctant twenty-seven-month stint, became friends with one of its other luminaries, Bloke Modisane.[38] *Drum* wasn't the only medium for disseminating the aesthetics of gangster and noir film, however. Comics and photo comics like *The Spear*, *Fearless Fang*, and *The Stranger* were enormously popular. Some, such as *The Spear*, featured a James Bond–like figure (with the obviously phallic moniker of Lance Spearmen) who was repetitively depicted carrying out his solitary adventures of vengeance and justice, while satisfying his own desires; others drew on the Dick Tracy lineage.[39] But fiction also staged the fusion of style and power.

Perhaps the most memorable evocation of the power of the zoot would be incarnated in Richard Rive's homage to District Six, the semiautobiographical, semifictional account of life in Cape Town's doomed "colored" neighborhood, "*Buckingham Palace," District Six*. Mr. Zoot, the smooth-talking, literarily gifted one-time petty criminal turned neighborhood sage, loves movies, and tap-dances and jives to make women swoon. He looks "smart in a check suit with padded shoulders, narrow waist, knee-length coat and trousers tapering at the ankles." The novel shares its mise-en-

scène with that of the film *Zonk!* (1950), the first South African film "for blacks" to depict the jazz scene—largely set in the colored world of District Six (it would be followed by *Song of Africa* [1951]). When it opens in 1955, Mr. Zoot wears Jarmans (rather than the oft-remarked Florsheims), and he likes to talk and argue about politics.[40] The predilection of the zoot suit wearer for the political would later be narrativized in Lewis Nkosi's *Underground People*, a novel that draws on the exiled author's own experience as a reporter in the 1950s for *Drum* magazine. *Underground People* tells the story of an "urban dandy," who, like Rive's Mr. Zoot, also writes verse and likes to jive, when he is asked by a national liberation organization to lead a peasant uprising. When being recruited for the job, Nkosi's Cornelius Molapo finds himself in a room reminiscent of the conspiratorial back rooms and police offices so common to noir films: "he felt oppressed by the claustrophobic atmosphere of the small office, by the dank smell of the runny toilet and the stale odour of cigar smoke."[41] Even so, Molapo is ridiculed as a bohemian and flattered with images of his own capacity for heroism. Taking the latter seriously, he relinquishes the love of style for a revolutionary militancy, only to discover, in Nkosi's embittered denunciation of corruption in the antiapartheid movement, that his recruiter is himself a turncoat in disguise. By the time of Nkosi's writing, then, the relationship between style and politics had come under suspicion from within formally political movements. To grasp that development and its apotheosis in films like *Hijack Stories*, however, we need to consider both the politicization of style and the emerging modernist repudiation of the aesthetics of recognition on which the emergent critique of style was based.

No doubt black audiences discerned, as did Richard Wright's Bigger Thomas, that Hollywood cinema had not been addressed to them, and for this reason their purpose was to radicalize the discourse they received through overhearing. For it was precisely such overhearing that the myriad mediations of noir aesthetics permitted. The mode of resistance developed in this context consisted, above all, in the refusal to not desire, the refusal to not consume. This refusal to not desire was also a refusal to accede to the demand for wage labor as the basis for legitimate and legitimately restricted consumption. It is therefore as the bearer of this desire, this sovereignty that declares itself immune not only to repression but to alienation and self-reification, that the *tsotsi* appeared. He emerged from his mercurial abode on the silver screen to invest the township with commodity desire, and to purvey the auraticity of the brand-name, knowledge of which marked the bearer as emphatically urban—to the point of being antirural—and cosmopolitan. Such desire is, of course, both the sign of ideological encompassment (by commodity culture) and a repudiation of the racial hierarchy that would have reserved the objects of such desire for white consumers. In this sense, the *tsotsi* made visible a contradiction within the capitalist logic

of the settler colony, which needed to interpellate subjects as consumers in an expanding market on one hand, and which attempted to maintain the borders of racial difference through differential ideological investment on the other.[42] The purpose of homelands and of apartheid more generally was to sustain a periphery within the national body, where, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak says of imperial formations more generally, capital could divest itself of the need to cultivate labor power, taking advantage of jurisdictionally limited labor laws and authoritarian political formations to retard consumerism among the subaltern classes (and the demand for higher wages that go with it).[43] In South Africa, "traditional leaders" and local patriarchs of ethnic homelands were legally authorized and invited into complicitous relations with the state, and the *tsotsi*'s township cosmopolitanism is, accordingly, pitted against this dual axis of rural authority and inhibited consumerism.

The significance of style for the *tsotsi* is not simply a function of his resistance to the policing of desire in an economy of artificial scarcity, however. Nor is it merely a matter of representing subcultural difference.[44] Style differentiates among different efforts to claim legitimacy for violence. Like the private eye of film noir, the *tsotsi* exposes the intimacy and the mimicry that binds the law (as police) and the outlaw (as *tsotsi*). To a certain extent, the *tsotsi* partakes of the aura that Walter Benjamin had attributed to the great criminal whose lawbreaking calls the very being of law, and the legitimacy of the state it sustains, into question by bearing witness to its violence.[45] But this does not mean that he is accorded innocence or virtue. For in addition to embodying self-consciousness and consumerism, he is the incarnation and aestheticization of instrumental reason, that same instrumental reason on which political violence always depends.[46] The affinity between the two is made visible in both literature and film, through forms of juxtaposition. Thus, for example, there are two iconic and narratively pivotal encounters with specular violence in Mark Mathabane's best-selling autobiography, *Kaffir Boy*, one in which the young boy witnesses a police beating, the other when he observes a group of *tsotsi*s doing the same thing.[47] In Miriam Tlali's stories, which are inflected by a critical consciousness of the particularly sexualized and sexualizing terror to which women are subject by *tsotsi*s, characters are similarly plagued by the twin threats of police and gangsters. In such juxtapositions one discerns the instability of the opposition between law and its other: the thin line is marked by the fact that the police have the false aura afforded by the state's political theology to sustain them, while the *tsotsi* has style.

One ought not forget, in this context, that the *tsotsi* of actuality also derived his power from his capacity to appropriate the consumer commodities of his township coresidents. Waylaying women returning from

shops, robbing workers on paydays, commandeering the produce of the township vendors: this was the activity through which most *tsotsis* acquired the means to assert and satisfy their refusal to not desire.[48] (*Mapantsula*'s staging of its character's robberies in the swank shopping districts of the white city is, in some ways, an obfuscation of this other primary fact—that *tsotsi* violence was primary directed at township blacks and migrating laborers.) One of the most vexing tasks confronting historians and participants in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was a confrontation with the degree to which oppositional political organizations cultivated and utilized township thugs to enforce boycotts and other protests during the 1970s and 1980s. Consumer boycotts (particularly in the mid-1980s) also provided the occasion for *tsotsis* to claim an authoritative political status which was not in fact grounded in recognition by party structures. In my own fieldwork, I have been the recipient of countless narratives about the brutality of this period, and the irony of consumer boycotts as a tactic that permitted those most opposed to the restraint of their consumption to demand the self-containment of others. As Miriam Tlali's stories insist, the prerogative to police consumption was, more often than not, appropriated by young men, and enacted against women.

In these contexts, then, the claim to radicalism always depended on an associative gesture, solicited by the very iconicity of *tsotsi* style, and following the logic of condensation and displacement that structures the oneiric world of film noir. The zoot suit that had become the *tsotsi* also permitted the identification between black subjects on either side of the Atlantic, albeit in a mediated and deferred manner. For what was offscreen in 1943 (in the United States and in South Africa), as noir emerged, was not only the war in Europe and Asia but also the "zoot suit riots," the urban uprisings in Harlem, Detroit, and other American cities that the African American author Chester Himes bluntly identified as race riots. Stuart Cosgrove has remarked that "when the nameless narrator of Ellison's *Invisible Man* confronted the subversive sight of three young and extravagantly dressed blacks, his reaction was one of fascination not of fear. These youths were not simply grotesque dandies parading in the city's secret underworld, they were 'the stewards of something uncomfortable,' a spectacular reminder that the social order had failed to contain their energy and difference."[49] White sociologists responded with investigations into the "zoot effect," even as municipalities attempted to outlaw the wearing of zoot suits.[50] To the extent that the zoot suits represented a refusal of war rationing, these riots articulated a generalizable opposition to the unevenness of capital, and the corollary repression of consumerism in subaltern classes, something not lost on the youths of Sophiatown, Soweto, and Alexandria or District Six. In the United States, the aftermath of the riots included the unjust trials of zoot suit wearers and "virulent" cartoons such as "Zoot-Suit Yokum"

but also the Chicano movement.[51] In South Africa, the growing cultural force of the *tsotsi* legitimated an intensifying repression of youth, which predictably incited the further development of youth politics, as testified to by the growing power of the United Democratic Front (UDF) and African National Congress Youth League and evidenced in the eventual transformation of local school protests into a national crisis at Soweto in 1976. At the same time, however, the limitations inherent to a politics of style came into question.

The Apotheosis of Style?

In black literary circles, this questioning ran alongside a debate about realism and modernism. Njabulo Ndebele, for one, derided what he termed an aesthetics of recognition in black literature: "the average African writer, working under an information ethos which for him has not habituated a tradition of rigorous analysis and interpretation, produces an art of anticipated surfaces rather than one of processes: processes in character development or in social evolution."[52] For Ndebele, the obsession with surface detail in literature, which had become a mark especially of crime fiction, is a function of "the moralistic ideology of liberalism" which "has forced our literature into a tradition of almost mechanist surface representation."[53] Arguing against the notion that subjective interiority is the mark of bourgeois ideology, Ndebele insisted that it is a necessary bulwark against totalitarianism, a refuge from ideology—as long as it is not severed from concrete reality. Cinema, especially the mannerist cinema of noir, was always at risk of recapitulating the aesthetics of recognition. Nonetheless, it was in cinema that the most trenchant self-critique of the politics of style appeared. Oliver Schmitz and Thomas Mogotlane's *Mapantsula* was the first film to both recognize and explicitly disavow insurgent consumption, theft, and fashion as an adequate basis for political radicalism, and the first film to make the *tsotsi* the figure in and through whom the question of political oppositionality is framed as one of consciousness (of interest and shared interests) and not only form and desire.

In the moment of the film's making, however, the *tsotsi* had itself metamorphosed. Indeed, by 1988, it had traversed the categories of flaneur, dandy, thug, and gangster as new waves of black cinema and music migrated from the worlds of Motown, Hollywood, blaxploitation cinema, and civil rights insurgency in the United States into the townships—where revolution and ennui competed for the hearts and sleeves of young men.[54] As it did so, the idioms within which it was spoken also changed, and in the late 1970s and 1980s, the term *mapantsula* briefly displaced *tsotsi* as a sign of both fashionability and resistant masculinity, drawing into its own

iconographic repertoire the figures of the suit-clad urban dance heroes of films like *Saturday Night Fever* (1977) and the fashions of iconic soul singers like Percy Sledge, whose 1970 concert in Soweto generated unprecedented sales and multiracial audiences.

In *Mapantsula* the exuberant sartorial resistance to the economy of scarcity forced upon blacks leads the protagonist, Panic, to rob clothing stores for the latest suit and to polish his black and white wingtips even as he walks along the unpaved red-dirt roads of Soweto. But this turns out to be the source of his vulnerability to prison wardens. His stylishness marks him off from the comrades who share his cell, which in fact the security forces mobilize in their effort to solicit Panic to inform. In the course of his lengthy detention, interrogation, and frequent torture, his clothes become soiled, the sheen of his sharkskin dulled. And it is when reduced to his black nakedness that Panic realizes that his clothes neither protect him nor constitute an adequate kind of "statement." Somewhat didactically, the film commences with a text that "explains" stylishness: "South African street gangs identified by their style of clothing and music. In their harsh surroundings there are no rules and survival of the fittest is the order of the day." It ends with a gesture that disavows the clothing, and the vulgar social Darwinism that it expressed. Panic's final gesture of sovereignty (whose implications we never see in the film), by which he says "no" to the demand for a signature that would lead to the deaths of the UDF comrades, marks the claim to a fuller subjectivity, one marked by the capacity for full enunciation. In suspending the narrative in this moment, the film leaves its viewers uncertain as to the relationship between sovereignty and subjectivity. For if sovereignty is marked by the capacity (however self-annihilating) for refusal, subjectivity demands the power of predication, and Panic never achieves the latter. His rages against his girlfriend's white bourgeois employers have the virtue of exposing their brutality but not of transcending the system of which they are the symptom. His reason is reduced to an instrumentality contained by the aspiration to acquisition. And he remains mute at the film's close, his silence noticeably contrasted to the loquacity and sociability of the comrades whom he only belatedly recognizes.

The history I describe reaches its apogee in *Hijack Stories* (2005) and Ralph Ziman's *Jerusalema* (2008), both starring Rapulana Seiphemo as the gangster, as did *Tsotsi*. *Hijack Stories* follows a young actor, Sox (Tony Kgoroge), as he returns to Soweto in pursuit of a real-life education about gangsterism as preparation for an acting role in a television serial. In the footsteps of an old schoolmate turned hijack impresario named Zama (Seiphemo), he enters deeply into the reality that he seeks to imitate, only to have his own role as actor usurped by the actual gangster. The film plays adroitly on the line between reality and reality effects, satirizing the film

industry's insatiable appetite for simulated violence, and the alienation of those who fabricate it from those who must live it. A constant refrain is the diagnosis of a society "fucked up," made by a former Struggle warrior who has joined Zama in his entrepreneurial violence. Sox, who has lived cocooned in Johannesburg's bourgeois suburbs, is referred to by the real gangsters as "Mr. Rainbow Nation" and "babyfood boy," but they nonetheless decide to give him his education.

Hijack Stories also offers an astute metacommentary on cinema's force in South African popular culture. The characters constantly invoke American cinematic heroes of the postnoir period. Thus, Zama and his colleagues answer Sox's question about where they learned the tricks of their trade (hijacking, raping, killing, robbing), by invoking the names of Bruce Willis and Sylvester Stallone, to which Sox offers Wesley Snipes as a more race-appropriate role model. In this respect, the characters of *Hijack Stories* live in a world produced by the breaching of the narrative boundary and the collapsing of the narrative space of cinema into the world of the viewer that Conley describes. At a screening of the old B-movie *Sexy Girls*, the youngest of the gangsters, Fly (Percy Matsemela), leaps to his feet and shoots at the gun-toting villain on the screen, emptying the theater of patrons who fear his real-life mania while the celluloid men fire their phantasmatic bullets at each other in an orgy of imitation slaughter. And when Sox begins to feel himself entering into the world of his new teachers, saying, "I just want to learn," Zama laughs menacingly and says, "You like this movie, huh?" He understands that Sox is not merely seeking to ground his performance in the reality of *tsotsi* life but that he also derives his conception of the *tsotsi* from cinema—and that the two are inseparable.

The realization of cinema's imbrications with reality is not, of course, limited to the genre films associated with the *tsotsi*. In Elaine Proctor's acute film about South African Defense Force soldiers on the Angolan border, *On the Wire* (1990), the soldiers compulsively view and review video they have made of their violent assault on a local woman, depending for both their pleasure and their sense of reality of the moment on its filmic inscription. But what links *Hijack Stories* to the history outlined above is that it stages the complex dependency on cinema as the basis for both constituting and apprehending reality as a matter of fashion, which becomes visible in the sartorial transformations that Sox undergoes. The film recapitulates a scene of his walking into Soweto three times, in each of which he is dressed differently. When he first arrives in leather jacket and mesh T-shirt, he is ridiculed as a city boy. When he comes back the second time, he looks like he has walked out of a blaxploitation film, with purple pants, thick-soled shoes, and a camouflage T-shirt. On his third sojourn, he is wearing loose khaki pants, an oversized T-shirt untucked, a red cap, and red sunglasses. It is this latter attire that finally leads Zama to

exclaim, "take off that fucking hat, man! You look like a criminal." Zama is not the criminal, he claims; that moniker belongs to the white people in Rosebank and the BEE (Black Economic Empowerment) aspirants who have abandoned their brothers in the township, or who were not there during the hard days of the Struggle. This claim to the political function of economic violence has a certain rationality to it, but only by virtue of the film's repression (through exclusion) of the frequently sexualized violence that so often accompanies it.

The film's penultimate scene includes a funeral at which Zama recites Ingoapele Madingoane's anthemic pan-Africanist poem "In Africa My Beginning, in Africa My Ending" to suggest the failure of fashion to address the questions of the political. In the movement between *Mapantsula* and *Hijack Stories*, Panic's obsession with fashion has given way to Sox's desire to access authenticity, which he nonetheless understands as a matter of appearance only, and for which he is prepared to surrender all judgment. The fetishization of stylishness, which noir offered as a displaced idiom of critique, and which expressed the refusal of desire's racialized containment, is rendered here as a false consolation, one that betrays a revolution that ought to have generated fuller and more equitable redistribution. At the final audition for the television show, the only adequate performance of the *tsotsi* can be made by the *tsotsi*, and the audition entails a reproduction of an actual mugging, though the producer does not know the referent (we have seen it in the opening sequences of *Hijack Stories*). It is a mugging of a black man, whose humiliation is addressed to him from within a language the white producers do not understand—for the *tsotsi* is speaking *tsotsitaal*.

The Language and Limits of Style

Tsotsitaal is here something like the sound-image of the *tsotsi*. An urban creole spoken in a rapid-fire, slang-filled, untranslatable manner, it now signifies cosmopolitanism in a way that the names of township jazz groups once did. But where monikers like the Harlem Swingsters and the Manhattans (the band with whom Miriam Makeba first made her name), along with the African Hellenics and the Cuban Brothers,[55] once implied that cosmopolitanism consisted in a relation with the world beyond South Africa, *tsotsitaal* signifies a cosmopolitanism internal to township life, one produced in and through the otherwise violent histories of migrant labor and forced relocation through which individuals from diverse language worlds came to live with each other. Nonetheless, *tsotsitaal* becomes language in the mode of style by virtue of its deployment in films as the mark of township authenticity. Adam Haupt has remarked this capacity of *tsotsitaal* to underwrite claims to authenticity in television and film (he

also focuses on *Yizo Yizo* and *Hijack Stories*), and suggests that it is part of a multiply mediated relay, in which kwaito music derives its authenticity from its use of *tostsitaal*, *scamtho*, Soweto-speak, and/or *gamtaal* (depending on the area in which the creole is spoken and the mix of languages at play), and then, as the sound track and extradiagetic source of the film's "sound," transfers that authenticity to the film and its male characters.[56] Some of those characters are played by musical performers and celebrities of the kwaito tradition, and a certain leakage of charismatic authority and authenticity thus traverses the boundary between film and television and actuality. Of course, this leakage is as much the subject of *Hijack Stories* as is the substitution of style for a fuller critical consciousness. The fact that the *tsotsitaal* and *scamtho* in *Hijack Stories* remain untranslated and unaccompanied by subtitles is, of course, the means by which the film forecloses the possibility of overhearing by those who speak exclusively European languages, and it thereby makes language the means of a certain autonomy.

It is not incidental to recall in this context that the critic who most opposed the aesthetics of noir and their introduction into South Africa was also an ardent opponent of music in film. In 1946, Stanley Huette described the "peculiar characteristics of the United States film industry" as ones of technical progress and artistic retrogression, whose worst manifestation was the musicals genre: "In the musicals . . . films became accessories to sound."[57] One is reminded, momentarily, of Siegfried Kracauer's critical analysis of precisely these mass spectacles when they arrived in Weimer Germany, but Kracauer believed in the possibility of the musical achieving truly cinematic status. This was because, in his mind, the risk of sound for film was not that it would overwhelm the theatrical element but that it would return cinema to mere theater by making dialogue and narrative meaning, rather than inanimate nature and its redemption, the object of attention. And it was precisely this redemption, this stripping away of rationalism's excess, in order to restore the world to something more than an instrumental function that he advocated. So much was this the case that Kracauer advocated an analytic distinction between sound and dialogue, such that sound would designate an aspect of nature recoverable from speech only in the moment of its alienation (as in Eliza Doolittle's cockney, or the distortions of Groucho Marx).[58] Such specificities as are communicated in and through *tsotsitaal* would, I think, constitute a significant resource in Kracauer's understanding. Huette shared Kracauer's sense of the separability of sound and dialogue, but he inverted Kracauer's valuations, fearing that sound would displace what was, for him, the primary narrative visuality of the cinema as art. And no wonder. From within the cloistered world of his Eurocentrism, sound inevitably became the site for the most profound anxiety. It was, after all, in sound that language could be

registered as an inassimilable difference, as that which would resist appropriation through recognition, and as the limit to surveillance and overhearing. This is why, of course, Miriam Makeba used to preface her singing of "Qongqothwane" (rendered for European-language speakers as "the click song") by repudiating the European rendition of her language as "noise." Of course, what Makeba resisted the *tsotsi* embraces, namely autonomy as untranslatability. It may be that untranslatability is as insufficient to the category of sovereignty as a sovereignty reduced to masculine prerogative to consume is insufficient for the claim of political radicalism. Certainly, neither strategy has the capacity to reflect upon the gendered conditions of its emergence or on the gendered implications of its enactment.

One must, of course, acknowledge that there have been efforts to redeem noir stylishness for political critique that mitigate against its reduction to fashion. One thinks here of Mickey Madoda Dube's *A Walk in the Night* (1998), a film based on Alex LaGuma's 1962 novella about a young colored steel worker and his prostitute brother, both of whom are brutalized by persisting white racism (at least one of the villains is a police officer). And stylishness has also been a means for youthful insurgency on the part of white South Africans, as chronicled by Katie Mooney.[59] What the latter shares with *tsotsi* subculture, of course, is its resistance to gerontocratic power, and its relentless masculinism. It would be impossible, in this brief space, to fully comprehend how and why the insurgency that materialized itself as style and stylishness (in both appearance and language) remained immune to a more gendered critical project, but I can remark here on some salient factors. Not the least of these is that, insofar as insurgent consumerism was pitted against white rule and apartheid, with its reification of native tradition as other, its demand for wage labor, and its racialized restrictions on consumption, *tsotsi* stylishness remained separated from any project addressing the structures of inequality within indigenous (but emphatically historical) traditions. Equally important is the relative incapacity of the feminine, as the category of the "to be looked at" in commodity culture, to signify opposition to that culture of looking within which stylishness can acquire its force as well as its desirability. Just as the subaltern is the one whose speech is structurally foreclosed, inaudible to power by virtue of its construal as meaningless and thereby incapable of making silence signify refusal,[60] so too the female (as subaltern) is the one whose visibility is also always already a form of invisibility. In the light of cinema, the woman is the one whose fashionability is always already a form of conformity rather than resistance. The masculinity that conserves itself through recourse to patriarchal privilege and resists self-critique by remarking the historical fact of emasculation by colonialism converges in the bitter end with a capitalist cultural logic that makes the feminine a mode of appearance without significance. This point of convergence is

the very place of the *tsotsi*'s emergence. As already noted, this is why the *tsotsi* can revel in unintelligibility whereas Miriam Makeba must insist on the meaningfulness of her language. Of course, there are always figures, like the iconoclastic Brenda Fassie, whose violation of ideological norms asserted itself despite every effort at both containment and neglect on the part of every kind of patriarchal authority. But as Njabulo Ndebele has so eloquently shown us, Fassie is sui generis, and no one performs "in her style."[61]

Notes

This article began, several years ago, as a reflection on film noir in South Africa, prepared for the conference organized by Miriam Hansen, "Cinema as Vernacular Modernism," at the University of Chicago in 2002 (for an account of the conference see Kaveh Askari and Joshua Yumibe, "Cinema as 'Vernacular Modernism' Conference, University of Chicago, 18 May 2002," Reports and Debates, *Screen* 43, no. 4 [Winter 2002]: 432–37). Separate invitations to pull that paper out of the drawer, by John Comaroff and Mark Wollaeger, led to the current reflections, and I am grateful for that provocation. Thanks also to Yvette Christiansë, Brent Hayes Edwards, Anna McCarthy, Angus Gibson, and the acute readers for *Social Text* for their conversations and helpful suggestions.

1. During *Yizo Yizo*'s five-year run, Mahlatsi and Gibson, who wrote, produced, and directed the show, also brought on board other directors, including Berry Berk and the Nigerian director Andrew Dosunmu. The topics addressed by the program, which incited not only press criticism but parliamentary debate, also broadened, to include AIDS and South African xenophobia, among other issues. The mise-en-scène of later episodes also changed, to include not only the township of the youths' school but the city to which some of the characters migrated after graduation.

2. It is not the township per se but the township school that is at stake in *Yizo Yizo*, the township more generally having become a stereotypical mise-en-scène for dramas about black life in South Africa.

3. Michael Herr, *Dispatches* (1968; rpt., New York: Vintage, 1991), 60.

4. The show's advertising, apparently directed to educators and scholars rather than viewers, emphasizes the polylinguistic dimension as the mark of its authenticity: "Although the majority of the characters are black, the hybridity of their cultures is evident as they alternate between English, Zulu, Sotho, Xhosa, and street language in their conversations and, at times, within individual sentences" (from the official Web site www.thebomb.co.za/yizo1.htm (accessed 30 March 2010).

5. I derive the notion of the "desiring machine" from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Robert Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983). As I understand it, this machine or machinery refers to the institutions, discourses, and practices that make/produce desire in the service of capitalism. Crucially, for Deleuze and Guattari, the desire that sustains capitalism is not limited to commodity desire, and is not confined to the consumerism of the market, but extends to the institutions of kinship and encompasses the organization of sexual difference via the Oedipal myth.

6. I use the term *hegemony* to refer to a noncoercive ideological system, wherein

the passivity or participation of subjects in an internally contradictory order based on the unequal distribution of capital is solicited via a systematically cultivated split between desire and interest. See Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon," in *Surveys from Exile*, trans. David Fernbach (New York: Penguin, 1973), 143–249; and Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International, 1971).

7. In his account of *Yizo Yizo* and *Hijack Stories*, Adam Haupt emphasizes the circuitry between the United States and South Africa in terms of U.S. cultural imperialism, remarking the period of the 1980s, when television shows like *The Cosby Show* and *Miami Vice* made their way across the Atlantic. (Haupt lists many such serials, though he excludes the most popular, namely nighttime soaps like *Dallas*.) Certainly Haupt is correct to recognize this circuitry, but the history is a much deeper one as I try to show here. Haupt, "Black Masculinity and the Tyranny of Authenticity in South African Popular Culture," in *Power, Politics and Identity in South African Media*, ed. Adrian Hadland, Eric Louw, Simphiwe Sesanti, and Hermm Wasserman (Cape Town: HSRC, 2008), 378–97; see especially 392.

8. The policy, established by the African National Congress government, is intended to facilitate the development of black capital. A more recent formulation of the policy has been named "Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment" and is intended to promote more equitable opportunity structures, as well as to mitigate what had been the privileging of black capital over job creation for the unemployed and underemployed. Its strategy document can be accessed at www.thedti.gov.za/bee/complete.pdf (accessed 1 November 2009).

9. Peter Davis, *In Darkest Hollywood: Exploring the Jungles of Cinema's South Africa* (Johannesburg: Ravan; Athens: Ohio University Press, 1996), 2.

10. Clive Glaser, *Bo-Tsotsi: The Youth Gangs of Soweto, 1935–1976* (Cape Town: David Philip, 2000), 50; C. V. Bothma, "'n Volkekundige Ondersoek na die Aard en Onstaans orrsake van Tsotsi-groepe en hulle Aktiwiteite soos Gevind in die Stedelike Gebied van Pretoria" (MA thesis, Department van Bantoetale en Volkekunde [Department of Bantu Language and Culture], University of Pretoria, 1951), 29.

11. Through this strategy, black South Africans were forced to inhabit a doubled system, not as residents of a more "primitive" economy—as pastoralists or peasants—but as ethnically separated and thus minoritized individuals who had to move between and occupy both an urban space (or at least an industrial space on the mines) *and* an agrarian periphery. The artificially produced "homelands" provided a permanent point of forced return for labor in the moment that it became superfluous in the urban spaces, thereby saving the state the responsibility and cost of ensuring its reproduction.

12. Es'kia Mphalele, *Down Second Avenue* (London: Faber and Faber, 1959; Northlands, South Africa: Picador, 1971), 90–91, 101.

13. Glaser, *Bo-Tsotsi*, 51–52, 68–70.

14. Bothma, "'n Volkekundige Ondersoek," 28; Glaser, *Bo-Tsotsi*, 47.

15. Mark Beittel, "*Mapantsula*: Cinema, Crime and Politics on the Witwatersrand," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 16 (December 1990): 751–61; and Davis, *Darkest Hollywood*, 24–25.

16. Glaser, *Bo-Tsotsi*, 20–46.

17. Glaser, *Bo-Tsotsi*, 71.

18. James T. Siegel, *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

19. For a synopsis of the film, see Davis, *Darkest Hollywood*, 14.

20. Although *funagalo* is associated with a later period, and mainly with mine labor, its logic is incipient in the narrative of *The Kaffir's Gratitude*.

21. Ray Phillips, *The Bantu Are Coming: Phases of South Africa's Race Problem* (London: Student Christian Movement, 1939), 124; Ntongela Masilela, "The New African Film Movement and the Beginnings of Film Culture in South Africa," in *To Change Reels: Film and Film Culture in South Africa*, ed. Isabel Balseiro and Ntongela Masilela (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003), 20; Jacqueline Maingard, *South African National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2007), 68–70.

22. The Film Censor Board restricted film audiences on the grounds of age or racial identity, and could intervene either by requiring cuts or by prohibiting the screening of a film outright. Under the Censorship Act (1931), the board assumed responsibility for limiting the distribution of films that would have deleterious effects on the security of the state. Even so, films were rarely actually banned even during the war and immediate postwar periods. In 1944, for example, 212 of 3,940 films were restricted, 9 of which were deemed appropriate for white audiences only and 5 of which, including *Tough as They Come* (1942), *The Man with Two Lives* (1942), the trailers for both, and *March of Time* (1935), were banned outright. A further 52 films were required to make "minor cuts." In truth, the racialized economy performed the task of selection as discriminatingly as did the official censors, and often more so. The act was revised in 1974 and again in 1996. For a discussion of censorship's effects on black cinema production and reception in the 1970s and 1980s, see Keyan Tomaselli, *The Cinema of Apartheid: Race and Class in South African Film* (New York: Smyrna, 1988), esp. 9–29. On its consequences for South African literary culture, see Peter McDonald, *The Literature Police: Apartheid Censorship and Its Cultural Consequences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

23. Stanley Huette, "Distasteful Trend in Modern Film Production: Must We Have So Much Sadism and Brutality?" *Sunday Times* (Johannesburg), 13 July 1947.

24. Rathebe also appears in Schmitz and Mogotlane's *Mapantsula*.

25. A fine account of this historical emergence is provided by James Naremore in his book *More Than Night: Film Noir in Its Contexts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). See especially the chapter "*Noir* Is Born," 11–26.

26. Paul Young, "(Not) the Last *Noir* Essay: Film *Noir* and the Crisis of Postwar Interpretation," *Minnesota Review* 55–57 (2002): 203–21; Edward Dimendberg, "Down These Seen Streets a Man Must Go: Siegfried Kracauer, 'Hollywood's Terror Films,' and the Spatiality of Film *Noir*," in "Film and Exile," special issue, *New German Critique* 89 (2003): 116.

27. Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton, *Panorama de film noir americain* (Paris: Minuit, 1955); translated as *A Panorama of American Noir Film, 1941–1953*, by Paul Hammon (San Francisco: City Lights, 2002). The English translation gives to the title the temporal framework retrospectively generated by Paul Schrader. See his "Notes on Film *Noir*," *Film Comment*, Spring 1972, 8–13. Paul Young's discussion of the contradictions and tensions within the historiography of noir appears in "(Not) the Last *Noir*."

28. Tom Conley, "Stages of 'Film Noir,'" *Theatre Journal* 39 (1987): 347–63.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid., 354–55.

31. Ibid., 358.

32. A recent reiteration and extension of Davis's argument appears in Dennis Broe's *Film Noir, American Workers, and Postwar Hollywood* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2009). Broe claims that noir films enacted, in an oblique fashion,

the class contradictions and struggles internal to the U.S. labor movement of the moment. For Hebdigde, see Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 1979).

33. Though a remake, the film credits the original screenwriters Samuel Fuller and Harold Medford for the script, which, it acknowledges, is in turn based on the story by Dwight Taylor.

34. Joseph K. Heumann and Robin L. Murray, "*Cape Town Affair*: Right-wing *Noir*, South African Style," *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Cinema* 47 (2005), www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc47.2005/capetown/index.html (accessed 30 March 2010).

35. If David Coplan is correct, even in South Africa, where jazz signified blackness from its earliest days, it also connoted and reproduced "Americanness." He argues that most South African jazz musicians brought little local distinction to their music during the 1940s, and that it was some time before they turned to indigenous roots in order to vernacularize it in the direction of such genres as *kwela*. See his *In Township Tonight! South Africa's Black City Music and Theater* (London: Longman, 1985).

36. Charles Scruggs, "The Whiteness of Film *Noir*," *American Literary History* 9 (1997): 545–46.

37. Njabulo Ndebele, "Rediscovery of the Ordinary," in *South African Literature and Culture: Rediscovery of the Ordinary* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 43.

38. Mphalele, *Down Second Avenue*, 177–78.

39. Thanks to Yvette Christiansë for drawing my attention to this utterly understudied genre.

40. Richard Rive, *"Buckingham Palace," District Six* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1986), 17, 24.

41. Lewis Nkosi, *Underground People* (Cape Town: Kwela, 1986), 66.

42. In this respect, my argument echoes Lesley Marx's treatment of the gangster figure more generally. See her "Underworld RSA," *South African Theater Journal* 10 (1996): 11–30.

43. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg and Cary Nelson (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 288.

44. Hebdige, *Subculture*.

45. Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," in *Reflections*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken, 1978), 281.

46. Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1970), 46.

47. Mark Mathabane, *Kaffir Boy* (New York: Signet, 1986), 192–94.

48. On gangster formations in South African townships, see Glaser, *Bo-Tsotsi*, as well as Keith Breckenridge, "The Allure of Violence: Men, Race, and Masculinity, on the South African Goldmines, 1900–1950," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 24 (1998): 669–93; Gary Kynoch, "'A Man among Men': Gender, Identity, and Power in South Africa's Marashea Gangs," *Gender and History* 13 (2001): 252; and my "The Mute and the Unspeakable: Political Subjectivity, Violent Crime, and 'the Sexual Thing' in a South African Mining Community," in *Law and Disorder in the Postcolony*, ed. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 57–101.

49. Stuart Cosgrove, "The Zoot Suit and Style Warfare," *History Workshop Journal* 18 (1984): 77–91, esp. 77.

50. Scruggs, "Whiteness of Film *Noir*."

51. Ibid., 551.

52. Njabulo Ndebele, "Turkish Tales and Some Thoughts on South African Fiction," *Staffrider* 7 (1988): 332.

53. Ibid.

54. This movement was not unidirectional, of course. As Donna Murch has shown, South African films such as *Come Back Africa* also circulated in black consciousness circles in the United States, and antiapartheid activism assumed an increasingly significant role for civil rights movements across the Atlantic. See Donna Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

55. Kippie Moeketsi, "Kippie's Memories and the Early Days of Jazz: Kippie Moeketsi Speaks," *Staffrider* 7 (1988): 362–71.

56. Haupt, "Black Masculinity."

57. Stanley Huette, "Hollywood—One Step Forward, Two Backwards," *Sunday Times* (Johannesburg), 11 August 1946.

58. Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997 [1960]), 108–9.

59. Katie Mooney, "'Ducktails, Flick-Knives and Pugnacity': Subcultural and Hegemonic Masculinities in South Africa, 1948–1960," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 24 (1998): 753–74

60. Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

61. Njabulo Ndebele, *Thinking of Brenda* (Johannesburg: Chimurenganyana, 2007).

Style, *Tsotsi*-style, and *Tsotsitaal*: The Histories, Aesthetics, and Politics of a South African Figure

Rosalind C. Morris

This essay examines the historical emergence and recent revival of the figure of the *tsotsi* via the transatlantic migration of aesthetic forms and their dispersal across generic and social spaces. The historical arc of the *tsotsi* traverses a period that opens at the beginning of apartheid and stretches into the present. I argue that this era saw the developing recognition on the part of the settler colonial state that coercive apparati needed to be supplemented by the desiring machinery of the mass media, which the South African state awkwardly appropriated, first through censorship and then through carefully controlled production, but always in a manner that was intended to sustain a racially differentiated relationship to consumption and the uneven development intrinsic to capital. Crucial to the *tsotsi*'s emergence, I argue, are the relationships between cinema and other media forms (print, radio, sound recording, and so forth) and the structure of overhearing that they enable. Paying particular attention to the ways in which the jazz musical and cinema noir converged to produce a figure of masculine sovereignty defined by a refusal to not desire in a space of racially contained consumerism, I then consider how particular visual and linguistic practices were autonomized in the mode of style. At the center of the essay is an exploration of the apotheosis of masculinist claims to sovereignty via style; it concludes by reflecting on the gendered aporia in any politics of style.

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