

Field Notes 2

January 10 2013 - Johannesburg

Need for a self-reflexive exercise -

A buttonhole for the last Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland



I noticed that a colleague who I would have thought of as elderly, had grown her hair past middle age bob and was wearing a hair slide at a meeting where important decisions were going to be made. She expected to be part of the decision-making. Who was she kidding? Did I have a right to judge?



A friend of mine - a high-profile scholar - known for her long, blond hair, addressed a group of us in a hot-air balloon, mind you, while we were floating over the Magaliesberg as a birthday treat for a colleague. When, she was wondering aloud, this friend of mine, who has a tendency to apostrophise, would she be too old to have long hair? When would she have to give up her odd fantasy of winning the Booker and when would she have to shear off her trademark* locks.

The trademark - la marque - which is more important than the function of the product and which mobilises the affective responses to help ensure consumer fidelity. (Baudrillard p. 267/8)



I don't actually have many memories of the time I spent in Zimbabwe (then Southern Rhodesia) as a young child. I remember the coming of TV, riding on my father's scooter to school and then this odd, little vignette that concerned a hair slide.

It was early morning and I was half-sleeping on a mattress on the floor of my parents' bedroom. I'm supposing that my father had been away. My mother always used to haul us into her room because she was afraid of sleeping alone - I found out later. But now he was back and I lingered there on the mattress. For some reason - perhaps I had already been up and dressed - I was wearing a hair slide towards the back of my head. It was a white, plastic bow. At some point I raised my head and then let it drop back on the pillow. And the slide dug into my scalp with a sharp, little pain that drew blood.

I mostly remember the quality of the pain. I was a dreadfully accident-prone child and split my head open at least twice before I was eight. But I remember the pain caused by the slide, whereas I don't remember feeling anything except discomfort and my mother's panic in the more catastrophic episodes. You know, it was that pain you feel when something you've cherished turns around and hurts you or bites you from a place you hadn't expected.



Advertising conquers us with solicitude. It personalises objects. It talks to you. It makes us loved by the object, it makes us exist, saves us from anguish, from misrecognition, from bad faith. (Baudrillard p. 238/9).