CHAPTER 9

Reflections of Business Culture in the Annual Reports

Asma Abdullah (1996: 3) quotes Talcott Parsons and Alfred Kroeber (1958) as saying that culture,

...refers to transmitted and created content and patterns of values, ideas, and other symbolic-meaningful systems as factors in the shaping of human behaviour and artifacts produced through behaviour.

In the next chapter (Asma, 1996:40) she goes on to define

organizational culture:

Every organization has its own words or phrases to describe its culture. Sometimes the words "core", "ethos", "identity", "ideology", "manner", "pattern", "purpose", "philosophy", "roots", "spirit", "style", "vision", and "the way" are used to describe the culture of an organization or corporate community. To most managers, these mean much the same thing.

Whatever term is used, the culture of an organization is often an expression of a set of deep-seated underlying assumptions and values that a given group has invented, discovered or developed in learning to cope and adapt to its environment.

While many of these "deep seated underlying assumptions and values" are inaccessible to a study that confines itself to analysis of text as its sole
mode of investigation, there are many that are. The teasing out of those that are is the focus of this chapter.

A four-pronged approach will be adopted. The first prong (9.1) involves identification of values and symbols stated or evident to observation in different parts of the annual report. The second prong (9.2) involves the analysis of the metaphors the business community uses to describe itself and its actions. The third prong (9.3) involves investigating the visuals that are used in the creation and reflection of values. The final prong (9.4) involves the analysis of extended texts as a means of discovering the lifestyles that the business community in Malaysia purveys.

9.1 Business Values Reflected in Different Parts of the Annual Reports

Asma Abdullah (1996) identifies three kinds of workplace values in Malaysia. The first, which she calls intracultural values, refers to the values held by Malays in their lives which could affect their business practice; the second, which she calls intercultural workplace values, are those that pertain to Malaysian institutions where Malaysians of different ethnic origins work together. The third, which she calls cross-cultural, would be the kinds of values held in multinationals where Malaysians come into contact with international, primarily western, work values. Table 9.1 below, slightly adapted from Asma Abdullah (1989) summarizes the main values Asma sees
as characterizing the intracultural and intercultural workplace on the one hand
and the crosscultural or Western-type workplace on the other:

Table 9.1 Values Underlying Management Practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concepts</th>
<th>Underlying Malaysian Values</th>
<th>Underlying Western Values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conflict</strong></td>
<td>Indirectness</td>
<td>Directness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Avoidance, Compromise</td>
<td>Confrontation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feelings</td>
<td>Logic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relationship – long term</td>
<td>Task/Result - short term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership</strong></td>
<td>Humility - hand-in-hand</td>
<td>Assertive spokesman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deference to elders</td>
<td>Ahead of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seniority-maturity</td>
<td>Achievement-oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consensus-seeking</td>
<td>Combative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Motivation</strong></td>
<td>Affiliation</td>
<td>Self-actualization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>Task-orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family-oriented</td>
<td>Individual achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spiritual fulfillment</td>
<td>Materialistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication</strong></td>
<td>Indirect, subtle</td>
<td>Direct, to-the-point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Holistic</td>
<td>Linear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Soft</td>
<td>Open and frank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Polite</td>
<td>Assertive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Third party intervention</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two observations come to mind when one examines the two sets of values. The first is that there is latent in the situation conflicts that require choice. The other observation is that there are many values here that need to be observed in the face-to-face interactions of the business community.
Admittedly, there are. How people behave in situations of conflict, for example, cannot obviously be observed in a document which only reports on objectives and outcomes and eschews the space before and between these two where conflict habitually occurs. The way people speak to one another, for example whether there is politeness and deference for elders or the talk is confrontational, is again only detectable in *in situ* observation. The point this section attempts to make is not that only texts, but that texts too, are possible sites of a great deal of ethnographic information. This section will illustrate some of the kinds and some of the ways this information is derivable. We shall look primarily at Mission statements, and Chairman’s Reports as sources of information about values valorized by the business community in Malaysia.

9.1.1 Values mirrored in Mission Statements

Perhaps the first observation to make about Mission Statements is that more and more Malaysian companies seem to have them in their annual reports. This fact in itself is reflective of these companies’ awareness of the world business trend to prioritize values as important resources for development. What specific values these are becomes clearer only on closer examination. For purposes of illustration we shall look at the mission statements of three companies with very diverse interests. How much similarity there is in the values held by these very diverse companies can be seen from TS9.1 and from Table 9.2 that summarizes the values they each proclaim to live by:
Table 9.2 Underlying Values of Three Malaysian Companies as Reflected in Their Mission Statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Golden Hope</th>
<th>Promet</th>
<th>AMFB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellence</td>
<td>World class</td>
<td>Recognised for the highest standards</td>
<td>Excellent services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>Committed to total quality</td>
<td>Provide quality service</td>
<td>Innovative products and services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profitability</td>
<td>Enhance returns to stockholders</td>
<td></td>
<td>Optimise returns to shareholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficiency</td>
<td>To be the best Managed</td>
<td>Innovative solutions to a host of ... needs</td>
<td>innovative products and services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
<td></td>
<td>Responsive quality service</td>
<td>Be more responsive to market needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominance</td>
<td>To be the best, To enhance Competititiveness, (to) be the preferred global supplier</td>
<td>Recognised... as an industry leader</td>
<td>To entrench its position as a premier finance company; To be more ... dominant (than competitors) in the areas of activity it chooses to engage in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate citizenship</td>
<td></td>
<td>To be a responsible corporate citizen</td>
<td>To strive to be a caring and responsible corporate citizen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good staff</td>
<td>Workforce fully committed to total quality, safety, health and environment</td>
<td></td>
<td>Highly skilled, motivated and responsive staff force with high ethical standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patriotism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Play a positive developmental role in ... Malaysia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being good employer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Be a model employer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Golden Hope's Corporate Vision

To be a World Class Conglomerate  
Committed to the Stockholders  

### CORPORATE KEY STRATEGIES

- To be the best managed world class plantation business  
- To be the best managed, diversified property and construction business  
- To enhance competitiveness and earnings of resource based manufacturing  
  - To be the preferred global supplier of resource based products  
- To have a workforce fully committed to total quality, safety, health and the environment  
  - To be a responsible corporate citizen  
  - To enhance returns to the stockholders  

### Promet's Corporate Philosophy

Promet Bhd is a diversified multinational corporation with strong core competencies in a wide range of businesses - civil engineering and construction, marine contracting and steel fabrication, property development and investment and infrastructure development.

In all its business dealings, the Group aims to be recognized for the highest standards as well as an industry leader which provides responsive quality service and innovative solutions to a host of infrastructural needs.

### AMFB's Corporate Mission

- To entrench its position as a premier finance company providing innovative products and services to its customers.  
- To play a positive developmental role in the economic development of Malaysia.  
- To be more responsive to market needs than its competitors and be more dominant in the areas of activity that it chooses to engage in.  
- To initiate and capitalize upon changes in the operating environment, providing excellent services and emphasising creativity and efficiency.  
- To be a model employer and maintain a highly skilled, motivated and responsive staff force with high ethical standards.  
- To optimise returns to the shareholders and enhance the value of their investments in the Company.  
- To strive to be a caring and responsible corporate citizen
While it is clear that most of the values expressed by the three companies are core values probably shared by most companies, some - e.g. being model employers - are emergent values. While most are international business values found in the cross cultural workplace, at least some attempt to incorporate those values that Asma Abdullah (1996:42) claims are specifically Malaysian values.

In the Malaysian context, an organization or a corporate entity is not only established to achieve a specific task and make a profit, but also to demonstrate a sense of social responsibility for the advancement of the community and the country. The task of building a corporate community which is truly Malaysian in its form, fixtures and features has now become an on-going agenda for most managers.

9.1.2 Values expressed in the Chairman’s Reports (CRs)

The same values seen in the mission statements are also found in the CRs but for the sake of economy we shall confine ourselves to just two qualities: the pursuit of quality and excellence. We shall briefly also look at the values the business community in Malaysia attaches to the human factor.

9.1.2.1 Quality and Excellence

Quality and excellence amount to a preoccupation within the business community. They, and underpinning them, profitability, appear to be the
overarching frame of reference against which all behaviour and effects of behaviour are judged. They occur in many forms in the CR:

a  Direct statement

Sometimes a value like excellence is held up for specific attention so that the reader can see it as a primary concern of the company in question. The following statement, for example, occurs as the first statement of Public Bank's 1995 Annual Report.

*Excellence is our commitment* (Public Bank, 1995)

The bald statement sets the theme and orients the reader's mind-set. But like thematic statements elsewhere, it is picked up and repeated throughout the CR in expressions like the following: *almost two-fold increase in the Group asset growth rate, the record performance in 1995, accelerated extension of credit by 39.7%, marked increase, significant increase, significant increases in profits, showed strong improvement in profits, a decisive increase in its paid up capital, take advantage of the significant processing techniques offered through advanced technologies, reducing overhead costs and increasing overall efficiency, taken concerted efforts in developing and training its workforce to provide and ensure the necessary expertise for the Bank's efficient operations.*

The notion of excellence and quality is also revealed in a number of indirect ways by the Malaysian companies.
b Citation of awards won

A very common form is through citation of awards won. Examples of these abound, especially in the CRs of large and successful companies as the following examples demonstrate:

**TS 9.1**

*Harpers Travel has once again won several awards for its achievements*

*(AMFB, 1994)*

**TS 9.2**

*Investment in machinery, processes engineering, training and quality management culminated in the award of MS ISO 9002, 1991 Quality Systems Certification by SIRIM*

*(Tractors Malaysia, 1994)*

**TS 9.3**

*Recently the company was awarded the "Most Caring Employer Award" by the Human Resource Ministry.*

*(Proton, 1995)*

**TS 9.4**

*George Kent (Malaysia) Bhd was awarded the coveted and internationally recognized ISO 9002 Quality Certification for its LPG cylinder valves as well as obtaining the Product Certification for FRP Panel Water Tanks from SIRIM.*

*(Johan Holdings, 1992)*

**TS 9.5**

*For the fourth consecutive year, RHS was voted the Best Domestic Securities House in Malaysia by Euromoney magazine. ...I am delighted to report that Asiamoney and Euroweek magazines rated Petronas Gas Berhad's RM3 billion initial public offering as the 1995 Equity Deal of the Year and*
Asian Equity Deal of the Year respectively. RHS was the lead
global manager in the listing of Petronas Gas, considered one
of Malaysia's most complex and unique capital raising
exercises.

(RHS, 1996)

c  Reference to Company's Position in the Industry

Position in the industry is given pride of place in the Malaysian companies'
order of priorities; almost every company in the corpus mentions position in
some form and some of the companies mention it a number of times within the
same CR. The citations below illustrate not only the fact that position is an oft-
mentioned value; they also attempt to illustrate the multiple facets of this
value.

TS 9.6
Berita Harian remained the market leader of the Bahasa
dailies.

(NSTP, 1995)

TS 9.7
As the country's premier hotel owner, the Group... This project
is X International's first eco-tourism venture in Asia...The
Pernas Group intends to become a leading player in this
sector... This expansion of production capacity should position
the Company favourably to satisfy growing demands.

(Pernas, 1994)

TS 9.8
Public Bank has been designated by Bank Negara as Tier-1
bank while Public Finance has been designated Tier-1 finance
company....Tier-1 status is only accorded to those banking
institutions which meet Bank Negara's criteria on capital
adequacy, asset quality, management efficiency, earnings, performance and liquidity position.

(Public Bank, 1995)

d Reference to possession of valued attributes

Yet another way is through mention of attributes generally recognized in the business community as attributes of good companies. One example of this is synergy:

TS 9.9
In view that options and futures broking offers synergy and is complementary to the stock broking activities of Public Bank Securities Sdn Bhd as well as the unit trust business of the Kuala Lumpur Mutual Fund...

(Public Bank, 1995)

TS 9.10
A synergistic interaction between Property and Plantation Division is in the offing with the probability of Jentayu Estate, located in Gurun, Kedah, being developed in the next few years due to its close proximity to the Gurun Industrial Park and the town of Sungei Petani, Kedah.

(I & P, 1995)

e Orchestration of many values in self promotion

The most common form in which value is revealed is in the multiple frames that each company invokes in establishing its image as an excellent company. The extract from the DMIB annual report of 1995 illustrates this:
Table 9.3a  Textual Invocation of Values : DMIB

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Textual invocation of values</th>
<th>Values invoked</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The implementation of the Rm100 million modernization programme to equip the tyre manufacturing plant with the latest state-of-the-art technology and precision equipment.</td>
<td>Up-to-date and modern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has enabled DMIB to introduce premium products into the market which had been the domain of imports in the past. The high performance Dunlop AVANTAGE 60 series and D62M along with the Dunlop LEMANS J-CINQ 65 series have carved a niche in this premium market segment. The 70 series J-CINQ and D8 recorded steep sales increases in the replacement market. DMIB is proud to earn the distinction of being the first and only tyre manufacturer in the country to produce a &quot;low-rolling resistance&quot; tyre... This &quot;low-rolling resistance&quot; or &quot;Green Tyre&quot;... will provide significant fuel savings and low noise levels, while at the same time enhancing riding comfort without sacrificing overall handling performance.</td>
<td>Competitive and of high quality High core competency Strategically effective Market leader Environment-friendly Customer-oriented</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

That different companies interpret excellence in different terms is revealed by contrasting the values that co-occur in DMIB's self representation as an excellent company with Promet's as revealed in the extract given below:

Table 9.3b  Textual Invocation of Values : Promet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Textual invocation of values</th>
<th>Values invoked</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>During the year, the Group continued to focus on its core businesses of marine contracting, civil engineering and construction and steel fabrication. With the expertise and track record built up in these core areas, we intend to position the Group regionally - and internationally - as a leading infrastructure developer and investor. Promet's projects could range from investment, either on its own or in joint venture to turnkey contracting. With healthy cash reserves ..., the Group is in a strong position to fund these projects.</td>
<td>Clear focus Expertise and good track record Large scope Market leader position Flexibility and high expertise Financial position</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Further to the successful completion of the Fauji oil terminal contract, the Group was awarded... a US$68 million contract... in Balochistan....

Undertaken on a turnkey basis, this project combines the skills and expertise of the Group in such core competencies as marine contracting, civil engineering and steel fabrication... During the year, we completed a SS26 million contract for Fantasy Island, a water theme park-cum-entertainment complex on Singapore's Sentosa Island. As with all projects undertaken by the Group, the Fantasy Island project was completed on schedule.

Skills, expertise, competencies

Large scope

Timeliness

A number of differences are noticeable. While both companies want to project an image of excellence, the terms in which they each perceive their own excellence is different. While the value of skill and expertise is common, the way in which each of these companies wishes to exhibit this value in its operations varies in scope. While DMIB projects itself as possessing great skill in a narrow area (tyre-making), Promet projects an image of expertise in a broad spectrum of skills related to three specific areas that the company is able, in at least some of its projects, to combine - marine contracting, civil engineering and construction and steel fabrication. While DMIB is boasting of its ability to make inroads into the premium markets that had hitherto been accessed only by imports, Promet manifests itself as an established member of the professional elite; it leverages on its track record and is considered expert enough to provide turnkey services.
Being an infrastructure builder for international clients makes the issue of being *on schedule* an important value worth mentioning for Promet but for DMIB, although it may actually keep to schedules, *mentioning* this value is not as strategically significant as it is for Promet. However, not all differences can be explained by reference to the situational differences that exist between the two companies. Both DMIB and Promet are in industries that are usually negatively associated with environmental issues and both, therefore have a need to have a stand on the environment that mitigates the view their environmentally-concerned stakeholders may have of them. However, only DMIB makes a bid at improving its environmental image. Promet is silent. The explanation of Promet’s stance perhaps needs to be found in the Malaysian business *zeitgeist* where, as we saw in Chapter 8, most Malaysian companies appear to be deaf to the environmental lobby that rages in the developed world today. DMIB’s concern to be seen as an environment-friendly manufacturer of tyres needs perhaps to be sought in the corporate value system it adopts as a subsidiary of the Sime Darby Group, which was one of the six companies that actually did show environmental awareness and concern in its Annual Report. In the environmental drama, rubber companies, specifically tyre manufacturers like DMIB and its parent company Sime Darby, become one of the chief villains by their association with the automobile industry and its perceived role in environmental pollution.
9.1.2.2 Values Associated with the Human Factor

The claims about how much companies value their staff are many. Almost every one of the chairmen thanks his staff, the management, the companies' business associates. There are overt claims of the value of people:

TS 9.11
People are the most important resource in an organization. Potently so in the labour-intensive newspaper publishing industry.

(Cover Rationale, NSTP, 1995)

TS 9.12
The Management firmly believes that its employees are its most important asset for the success of its business strategies.

(Public Bank, 1995)

There are even clear echoes of state-of-the-art, global thinking on human resource valuation:

TS 9.13
Our remuneration policy gives extra reward for individual merit. We also allocate funds for welfare and social amenities including medical services concentrating on preventive medicine. We recruit men and women on equal terms and all our staff receive training relevant to their jobs and are encouraged to contribute to their fullest ability. Our employees are informed of Company progress and developments. They are encouraged to offer their views in those areas they are directly involved.

(Tenaga Nasional, 1994. My emphasis)
If we make the assumption that people are thanked for the things that are valued in them, then there is an amazing similarity in the attributes that all the companies in the corpus value in each group of people in their discourse community. A sample analysis of the attributes mentioned in the acknowledgement sections of the Chairmen's reports is given on the next page.

Apart from the mention of talent and leadership effort in the Tenaga report, the attributes valued in the workers whether they be management staff or ordinary employees are support, loyalty, hard work. These seem those of the obedient, passive individual, the prototype of the good worker in the Asian tradition, not the proactive individual with initiative and creativity who seems to be valued in the global market. Perhaps the inertia of years of cultural conditioning still holds its hegemony in the silent recesses of the Malaysian businessman's thinking despite his loud proclamations about training, technology, skill and state-of-the-art. Perhaps in its day-to-day practices, the Malaysian workplace still practices the autocratic, authoritarian style of leadership and valorizes dogged diligence and unquestioning obedience and loyalty over creativity and initiative which ontologically cannot avert disobedience and a questioning attitude. The strange thing is that even management is not thanked for its leadership qualities, or its initiative or innovation. The fact that these more dynamic qualities are not mentioned in the acknowledgement is not proof of their absence. Innovation and new concepts are constantly mentioned among the milestones and firsts that the reports habitually talk about; someone must have been innovative and must have possessed leadership qualities and creativity for these to happen.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Board</th>
<th>Employees</th>
<th>Management</th>
<th>Shareholders</th>
<th>Business associates</th>
<th>Government, KLSE etc</th>
<th>Customers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Johan</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hardwork</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Contd. Support &amp; confidence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proton</td>
<td>Continued Guidance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Contd. Support &amp; confidence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malakoff</td>
<td>Advice and help</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Support &amp; confidence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RHB</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Support &amp; confidence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosaics</td>
<td>Advice &amp; Contributions</td>
<td>Hardwork, Dedication &amp; loyalty</td>
<td>Hardwork, Dedication &amp; loyalty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selangor Coconut</td>
<td></td>
<td>Contribution, dedication &amp; service</td>
<td>Contribution, dedication &amp; service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMFB</td>
<td>Guidance &amp; assistance</td>
<td>Commitment &amp; contribution, dedication &amp; commitment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Leong Properties</td>
<td>Guidance &amp; assistance</td>
<td>Commitment, dedication &amp; commitment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>confidence &amp; support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenaga</td>
<td>Counsel</td>
<td>commitment, contributions, talent, resources, leadership effort</td>
<td>commitment, contributions, talent, resources, leadership effort</td>
<td></td>
<td>conid. support</td>
<td></td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9.4 Values Associated with Different Groups within Discourse Community
The point that is being made, therefore, is not that innovation does not exist. It is that while innovation is valorized, those that are innovative are not. The argument is that if what people are thanked for in an institution is part of the value system of that institution, then the value system institutionalized in these companies does not seem to make innovativeness, initiative and creativity acts of "heroism" or "contribution". As we shall see in section 9.3 below, acts of conditioning staff to behave in ways the company wants them to are not alien practices in the Malaysian business world. Some in fact overtly talk about cultural conditioning:

TS 9.14

*The Bank recognizes that Leadership culture and Sales culture are core components that will assure the highest service and product quality standards.....From Day One, an employee joining the Bank will encounter this cultural remoulding.....This cultural conditioning does not end here*...

(Public Bank, 1995)

What is strange is why these companies that will go to such lengths to inculcate values through training do not use the simple device of thanking people for possessing the cultural values that they want people to possess.

9.2 **Metaphors As Mirrors of Self Concept**

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) describe the importance of the "concepts that govern our thoughts" and argue that "human thought processes are largely metaphorical":

The concepts that govern our thought are not just matters of the intellect. They also govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details. Our concepts structure what we
perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people. Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities. If we are right in suggesting that our conceptual system is largely metaphorical, then the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor (p 3).... metaphor is not just a matter of language, that is, of mere words. We shall argue that, on the contrary, human thought processes are largely metaphorical. This is what we mean when we say that the human conceptual system is metaphorically structured and defined. Metaphors as linguistic expressions are possible precisely because there are metaphors in a person's conceptual system.

The focus of this section will be precisely the identification of the metaphors by which the Malaysian business community lives, the terms in which it sees itself and its activities.

The section will be concerned with two broad areas:

1. metaphors which capture the mental frames the community has of itself and business
2. the use of grammatical metaphors as a way of accomplishing its ends

9.2.1 The Mental Frames the Metaphors Used by the Business Community Evoke

The metaphors the business community uses to describe itself and its work evoke many different frames.

9.2.1.1 Business as a person

One important frame is the conceptualization of the Company/Group/industry as a person with beliefs and feelings:
(i) Buoyed by the country's robust economic growth and encouraged by the strong demand from customers, Negara Properties launched...

(ii) ...the construction industry enjoyed another year of...

(iii) The Bank remains mindful of the various challenges ahead...

A person capable of action and thought:

(i) Promet secured a number of projects...

(ii) Negara Properties succeeded in obtaining the contract to develop...

(iii) Being a responsible corporate citizen, Viking-Askim continues to employ 117 rehabilitated drug addicts...

A person possessing special skills:

(i) RHB continues to demonstrate its ability to respond rapidly to market changes and preserve its well-recognized position as...

9.2.1.2 Business as a competitive sport

Perhaps the most dominant of all the metaphors are those that evoke a frame for business as a competitive sport, specifically racing:

(i) Malaysian Business and Investors' Digest have been able to maintain their leading position.

(ii) The ability to change rapidly to keep up with advances in communication

(ii) AMFB is poised to continue to introduce more innovative products faster

(iv) It has successfully won contracts

(v) ...achieved a record pre-tax profit of...

(vi) There is a constant need to innovate...to in the lead.

(vii) With the expertise and track record built up...

(viii) ...an increase of 37.9% over the previous year...thereby surpassing the RM5 billion mark.

(ix) To have a greater equity stake in the Bank...
While the picture of the Malaysian as portrayed by Asma Abdullah is of a gentle human being who prizes co-operation and relationships above competition and task orientation, the Malaysian as businessman emerges a very task-oriented, competitive and even aggressive human being. The images of the style of competition that emerge all speak of aggression and hegemony, as can be seen in the following examples:

(i) *seizing* this opportunity...
(ii) *captured* a significant market share
(iii) (MCM) has a *controlling* share.
(iv) *aggressive* marketing
(v) Newspapers continue to *dominate*
(vi) Jelita has thus constantly reviewed itself to be *ahead of the pack*
(vii) *so as to position* the company with *competitive advantage*...
(viii) *positioned to capture* more readership...

9.2.1.3 *Business as a terrain or ecology*

The most pervasively used ecological metaphor is that of niche associated almost exclusively with the notion of market niche. However, other related metaphors e.g. *climate*, *erosion* and *environment* are also quite extensively used:

(i) *Both companies ...will venture into new markets once they have found their niches.*
(ii) *liberal operating environment*
(iii) *increasingly competitive environment*
(iv) *a climate of favourable business scenario*
(v) *margins were eroded by a reduction in brokerage rates*
However, the ecological motif pervades the discourse in the extended metaphor of business as a terrain within which the businessman can adopt a number of roles. He can adopt the role of a topographer:

(i) *the Tradewinds Group charted yet another year of high growth*
(ii) *strategies would be mapped out and action taken to enlarge the group's operations.*

He can also adopt the role of an explorer:

(i) *The Public bank would continue to explore business opportunities*
(ii) *The Company has ventured into Indonesia*
(iii) *(staff) find their way into enhanced workplace performance...*
(iv) *(the NSST Group) took a bold move into ...*

9.2.1.4 Business as a Sea

A variant of the frame of business as a terrain is business as a sea. This is almost exclusively confined to two notions: buoyancy and surge. The following examples illustrate how these are used:

(i) *...the continued buoyant activity of the local bourse*
(ii) *...In line with the buoyant economy...*
(iii) *...would lead to a surge in the profits*
(iv) *...a surge in fee-based activities*
(v) *...to tap the surge in demand*
(vi) *...the pre-tax profit of the company surged to a record ...*

9.2.1.5 Business as a journey

A large number of the metaphors conceive of business as a journey:
9.2.1.6 Business as a State of Health

The notion of health is pervasive in the discourse of the annual reports. The metaphor can be termed extended in the sense that many aspects of health are manifest. Health as a positive state is very common:

(i) ...healthy Federal Government position
(ii) This was in tandem with robust business activity in most of the leading sectors of the economy...
(iii) This healthy result has been attributed to...
(iv) Buoyed by the country’s healthy economic performance...
(v) As a socially responsible entity, the Company has been contributing to the well-being of the community
(vi) With healthy cash reserves...the Group is in a strong position...

There are also some images of anatomical malfunction and disease in the annual reports, as seen in the examples below:

(i) prices generally remained depressed...
(ii) labour shortage continued to plague production
(iv) start-up hiccups are likely to affect the bottomline to some extent
Metaphors of recovery however, are far more common than images of disease:

(i) *The rehabilitated and expanded manufacturing operation are expected to*...
(ii) *The Group* ... *rehabilitated the other latex examination glove plant*
(iii) *A lack of strong pick-up in external demand*...
(iv) *A sluggish recovery of global demand*...
(v) *The major industrial countries did not pick up*...
(vi) *The import of foreign labour provided a temporary relief to the acute labour shortage*

The predominant health metaphor, however, is related to the notion of strength and its obverse, weakness. The examples below reveal the range of use of this pair of opposites:

(i) *Crude palm oil prices strengthened*...
(ii) *strong buying interest in Pakistan and China*...
(iii) *efforts to strengthen yield*...
(iv) *strong increase in crude oil and natural gas production*...
(v) *The demand for residential houses remained strong*...
(vi) *strengthen value-added contribution from R & D*...
(vii) *I am encouraged by the strength of the new team we have managed to build up in Singapore and the Philippines*...
(viii) *the general weakening of MDF prices*...
(ix) *the used equipment market was relatively weak*...
(x) *the natural rubber market remained weak*...

9.2.2 **Grammatical Metaphors**

While the concepts that we looked at in section 9.2.1 above were more long term, stable conceptualizations of the business community, the metaphors we shall look at here relate to temporary reconceptualizations for the specific purpose of inclining the reader to a particular reading of events or states. The conceptualization they bring about occur not at the point of perception of the
"real situation" but at the point of representation of the situation in words. The primary mechanism for this appears to be grammatical structuring. (For a fuller discussion of this phenomenon, see Halliday, 1985: 319 - 345). They serve as an important, and often conscious, vehicle of heteroglossia.

One important device available for this transforming process is nominalization. The following example suggests some of the ways in which this transformation is rendered and made acceptable:

_The short supply of world edible oils due to the sizeable reduction in the production of other vegetable oils and anticipated lower stocks of oilseeds should augur well for palm oil._

The first point to notice is perhaps the fact that many processes have been converted into states or entities in the subject of this sentence:

**Process**

- The supply of edible oils has become short
- The production of other vegetable oils has been reduced
- Stocks of oilseeds have become lower

**Nominalized State/Entity**

- _The short supply of edible oils_
- _The reduction in the production of other vegetable oils_
- _The lower stocks of oilseeds_

A second point to notice is that the nominalization allows the selection of determiners and that the writer has chosen the definite article _the_ to go with each of the nominalized entities. A third point to note is the possibility of attribution that comes with the nominalization. The writer has here chosen to describe the reduction in production of other vegetable oils as _sizeable_. He also talks of the _anticipated_ lower stocks of oilseeds. The net result of this grammatically-engineered transformation, it is suggested, is to change the status of the information given. Reported as processes, the information would
have had "new" status and would therefore have been deemed contestable. In its nominalized form, particularly with the selection of the definite article, the information is backgrounded and has rhetorically conferred on it a "given" status. The attribution sizeable is the writer's evaluation but embedded as it is in "given" information, it too goes uncontested. In its past participle form anticipated is a transformation of a process (the verb "to anticipate") that naturally requires a doer, an anticipator. This process being converted into an attribute (the anticipated lower stocks of oilseeds) thereby averts the question "Who anticipates?" In short, what has been grammatically effected is the acceptance of an opinion as an uncontestable fact. This clip occurs in the Prospects section of the CR and the rhetorical effect of this grammatically-negotiated unquestioning (unquestionable) status is that the reader buys into the Chairman's claim that all this augurs well for palm oil.

9.3 Business Culture as Mirrored in the visuals

The Annual Report is a multimodal document and the visuals within it are one of the richest sources of ethnographic information. We saw that various values such as the importance attributed to image, the need to balance information-giving with exploiting the opportunity to persuade, the need to establish credibility etc - are a part of the value system of the business community. We also saw that these same values are a part of the knowledge system of the writers of the Annual Report. In this section we will look at how the visuals in the Annual Report reflect, reinforce and exploit this value-cum-knowledge system.
9.3.1 Forms of visuals

Visuals come in many forms in the annual reports. The most common are graphs or bar charts of financial performance; logos or cover designs; photographs of people, events, products and processes; graphs indicating trends in performance of the Company, the industry and/or the country; maps indicating the sites of operation of the company and its subsidiaries and verbal graphics in the form of excerpts from the main text of the Chairman's Report differentiated from the rest of the text in a number of ways (e.g. words set in colour bars along the margin; words in larger print at the beginning of the CR). Each of these visuals functions as a rhetorical Janus, with one face aligning itself with the rest of the visuals in the report, the other aligning itself to the flow of the verbal narrative.

9.3.2 The Visual Narrative

Cumulatively, the visuals in the Annual Report weave a coherent narrative of their own. Although this narrative always complements the verbal narrative, it is also capable of being read on its own and forms part of the rhetorical culture of the users of the Annual Report. In fact, leaving out the visual presentation would be tantamount to removing certain key notes from the keyboard of meaning resources upon which the writers of the Annual Report play in creating the harmonies that characterize its meaning modulation system. In this subsection, therefore, we will look at the ways in which the visual narrative functions in the Annual Report. As a full discussion of the visual technology of the Annual Report is outside the purview of this thesis, a

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suggestive analysis of the visuals in one Annual Report will be used to illustrate the ways in which the visuals serve to give a picture of the company.

9.3.2.1 Visuals in the DMIB Annual Report of 1994

Two of the oft talked of realities of modern life are information explosion and the premium on time. People seldom have time to read everything, even in the documents they have chosen to read. The visual technology of the DMIB report ensures that even fleeting attention to its pages will etch enough images in the minds of its readers to enable them to reconstruct its success story. We saw in section 9.1 of this chapter that the values DMIB strives to project of itself is of a company that is up-to-date and modern, one that is competitive and has products of high quality, that is a market leader that is strategically effective, customer-oriented and environment-friendly. That these same values are projected through the visuals can be seen in the listing of some of the DMIB graphics and the captions that accompany them. These are shown in Table 9.5 below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Visual</th>
<th>Caption</th>
<th>Values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Logo</td>
<td></td>
<td>Leadership, up-to-dateness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEADERSHIP</td>
<td></td>
<td>Quality, service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THROUGH</td>
<td></td>
<td>Company of the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td></td>
<td>Quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality</td>
<td></td>
<td>Customer-oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td></td>
<td>State-of-the art and modern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A visual symbol in the shape of Q containing the words &quot;Global Quality – Towards</td>
<td>The latest line of state-of-the-art vertical hydraulic presses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision 2020&quot; in the bottom right hand corner of every page from page 3 through to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>page 23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photograph of a busy Dunlop Service Centre</td>
<td></td>
<td>Environment-friendly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photograph of a very high tech tyre factory with a very efficient-looking employee</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in it</td>
<td></td>
<td>Market leader, modern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photograph of a tyre against a green background</td>
<td></td>
<td>state-of-the-art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A close-up photograph of a constacker against a background of containers in a port</td>
<td></td>
<td>State-of-the-art, high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photograph of a building with inset of a man working on a computer with very high</td>
<td>The newly completed Sime Darby Tyre Technology Centre is the first</td>
<td>core competencies market leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tech looking machinery beside him</td>
<td>comprehensive tyre research centre in Southeast Asia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to portraying these institution-specific values, the visuals also reflect the core values that Malaysian companies seem to want to portray in their representation of themselves. For instance, the photographs that accompany each entry in the Corporate Diary cumulatively portray the day-to-day life of the company but severally they also portray specific values that the company wishes to depict as facets.

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of its corporate image. Twenty-two photographs are embedded in the 6-page Corporate Diary.

According to Mumby and Stohl (1991:316),

A particular hegemonic social formation is...articulated through various discursive practices which function ideologically to 'fix' meaning in a particular way. Individual subjectivity, or identity, is constructed through its enmeshment in social and communicative practices. This process demonstrates the extent to which ideology is not simply ideational (i.e. embodied in individual ideas and beliefs), but is rather grounded materially in day-to-day discursive processes. From this perspective, then, power is conceived not as simple coercion, but rather as the process through which consensual social relations are articulated within the context of certain meaning systems.

The photographs of the employees and the kinds of activities that these photographs show them being involved in demonstrate the truth of Mumby and Stohl's claim that personal identities within an organization and the "consensual social relations " in which they participate are ideological and discursively negotiated. The photographs valorize certain behaviours among staff and in this way make the subject position the company projects for its employees to occupy as the "natural" and desirable subject position to adopt. For example, four of the photographs in the Corporate Diary are of award-giving ceremonies. Loyalty to the company is celebrated in the half-page photograph of the 140 employees who received Long Service Awards from the Company. One photograph is of the presentation of Excellent Attendance Awards given to 20 employees who have had no medical records, another is of employees from various divisions participating in the DMIB Team-Building
Programme. Yet another is of a ceremony in which 76 Dunlop tyre dealers were presented with the Dunlop Top Achievers Award and 3 dealers received the Most Improved Dealers Award. Valorizing loyalty, regular attendance, team spirit and achievement through the award system, it is suggested, is the insidious control mechanism the Company uses to overcome problems like quick staff turnover, absenteeism and laid-backness. As Mumby and Stohl (1991) point out, it does this, not by asserting authority, which does not go well in the egalitarian work environment of today, but by making the employees buy into the system of values that the company promotes for self-benefit, but in the guise of paternalism and interest in employee welfare:

Such a relationship is not based on coercion, but on the ideological construction of a meaning system in which it 'makes sense' that a worker should not be absent from work, however important the reason (p323)... At the system level, absence means lack of worker commitment, poor work attitude, lack of responsibility and failure to fulfill contractual obligations. At the group level, absence means added stress on team members, co-workers taking up the slack, betrayal of communal obligations and a threat to the team identity. At the individual level, absence means guilt and/or deviance. To the extent that these meanings dominate organizational life, choice is abdicated: the individual becomes bound as a team member to be present at the workplace; the group is bound to humiliate and/or punish the absent member; the system is bound to rehabilitate or exorcise the absent worker. (p324)

The subject position the Company accords itself vis-à-vis its employees is another thematic thread that runs through the story the photographs weave of the Company.

That the company values skill and plays a proactive role in ensuring that its staff's skills are kept well-honed is the underlying motif in a number of
photographs. One photograph, for instance, shows DMIB employees receiving training in Dunlop factories in Japan. Other pictures show sales incentive trips for dealers, conferences and seminars (with titles like Change and Move To Meet Challenges). The fact that the Company involves employees at all levels in the decision-making process and hopes for their active participation in the affairs of the Company is the covert message in a photograph showing the launch of a Suggestion Scheme with the accompanying comment "800 suggestions were received to date from employees, of which 428 have been implemented".

Another thread that runs through several of these photographs is the company's caring and appreciative attitude. The family spirit in DMIB is the subject of a photograph which shows a clip from a Family Day organized by the Company. In the same spirit, another two photographs show DMIB employees engaged in Company-organized sports meets.

The Company's overseas activities and its marketing bids are the subject of some photographs. Different photographs portray DMIB's participation in the biggest trade fair in the Middle East, its participation in the Intermat 1994 Exhibition in Paris to promote export of Simex tyres into the European market, its exhibition of company products in the Zimbabwe International Trade Fair.

The responsible and caring corporate citizen theme too is another thread. The last photograph in this series, for instance, shows a DMIB official
shaking hands with a worker from Bethany Home. In the foreground is a pile of tyres; in the background, a van with the name *Rumah Bethany* (Bethany Home) and *kanak-kanak terencat akal dan epileptik* (brain-damaged and epileptic children) written clearly on it. Another photographs shows DMIB employees involved in a Gotong Royong (Neighbourliness) project.

9.3.3 Values communicated through visuals

As with the other sections, this section again will not attempt a comprehensive presentation of all the different types of graphics. Instead, it will merely attempt an illustrative analysis of two types of graphics: bar charts and photographs.

9.3.3.1 Bar charts

Most, though not all, the annual reports in the corpus have bar charts to illustrate their financial position in the current year vis-à-vis their position over the preceding four years. By intertextual reference, it can be seen that this is fairly standard practice and is part of the community's framing ideology to evaluate by comparison and to provide warrants for nurturing the belief that the company is a "going concern". The modality conventions of the Annual Report are not those of Science but the Annual Report draws on the attitudinal frames that the scientific basis of modern life has ingrained into the semiotic susceptibilities of the modern person. Because the bar charts provide a
numerical basis for the evaluation of performance, the ambient zeitgeist, that has spawned such subjects as sociometrics and econometrics, would probably incline the reader towards the belief that numbers cannot lie, and that the information in the five-year profiles should count heavily in his mental construction of the financial position of the company. However, closer examination shows that the guise of objectivity that the numbers help the information to put on can be deceptive. The nature of the obfuscation becomes visible when we look at the practice of a few companies together. To concretize the claims to be made, we will peg the ensuing discussion on the following three financial profiles:
A number of observations can be made. If we interpret the mandatory Profit and Loss Statements and the Balance Sheets as synopses of the expert community's evolved knowledge, or at least opinion, of what should/can be significant indices of the financial wellbeing of a corporate enterprise, we can see that a number of different indices are used: turnover, profit before tax, operating profit, profit attributable to shareholders, earnings per stock unit etc. The normal practice in the financial highlights is for each company to present statistics on about four of these indices only, that is they choose what they want the graphics to show. This, it is suggested, is rhetorically significant in that choice from an array provides the flexibility for heteropraxia and subjectivity. When there are many indices to choose from and only some are chosen, those that are chosen and those that are not chosen (the absences, in Fairclough's terms) are significant indices of rhetorical purpose. If we look at the choices made in the examples given above, two points become clear. They do not all choose the same indices and they all choose indices that generally reflect well on the company's current financial position.

A number of explanations offer themselves. One is that the annual report is not, as we have seen before, a purely expository document intended to give information. As a document that is used by fund managers and shareholders (prospective and current) in their decision as to whether to invest in the company or not, the annual report needs also to be a persuasive
document. It needs to convince the reader that the trajectory of its growth (as would be visible from a Five Year Highlight) is encouraging. Another reason can perhaps be sought in the discursive practice associated with the Five Year Highlights in the annual reports. One salient factor in this practice is perhaps the fact that Five Year Highlights are always stand alone; they do not come with any commentary that can explain away, or at least provide the circumstances that extenuate, any negative impression that the statistics may give. Another feature of current discursive practice that may orient the rhetor towards only providing positive statistics is the fact that the term *highlights* in the caption that goes with the barcharts has always been interpreted to demonstrate where the lights have been high i.e. to present the landmarks, the marks of excellence in performance shown by the company. *Highlights* is not interpreted to mean, as potentially it could, the major performance features, including both good and bad aspects.

9.3.3.2 **Photographs**

Photographs are the most frequently used visuals in the annual reports. In the annual reports in the corpus, there are photographs of people, of events and of products. Most photographs combine all three, sometimes in the form of single photographs and sometimes in the form of photo collages. Some - for example photographs of management – however, portray only one of these.
The people whose photographs are featured in the annual reports fall roughly into three categories: the management of the Company, other employees of the company and visitors or significant others that the company would like to project as associated with the company.

(i) Management Staff

The photographs of the management in the annual reports in the corpus mirror a number of traits of Malaysian society in general and the business community in particular. Firstly, the photographs are always formal shots; there are no candid shots of management staff in informal poses. In a sense this is an indication of the globalization of discursive practices as this is a feature of annual reports all over the world. However, it can also be claimed that this is a feature of local culture in that the formality of the photographs can be seen as a concomitant of the power distance that Asma Abdullah (1996) talks of. For Malaysians used to associating power and dignity with formality even in familial relationships, an informal CEO would be, if not exactly inconceivable, at least unpalatable. Another associated feature of these photographs is the well-groomedness of their subjects. While well-groomedness seems an appropriate, and perhaps even necessary, concomitant of formality, what seems particularly noteworthy is the interpretation of well-groomedness demonstrated in the photographs of the management staff in the annual reports. The fact that Malaysian society is multicultural or that it is
Asian is nowhere in evidence in these photographs. All the men are in three-piece lounge suits. While Malaysian Chinese women habitually wear western clothes, professional Malay women almost invariably wear traditional Malay attire. However, even the Malay women shown as part of management staff in the annual reports are almost invariably in business suits. There is no necessary relationship between western dress and efficiency and power; yet, western dress, if we are to believe the evidence of the photographs, seems to have a metonymic force in evoking a western way of life which it appears is synonymous with efficiency and power. Investigating whether this is an inheritance of Malaysia's colonial past or an effect of more modern economic colonization of the countries of the South by the privileging of western business practices in the twentieth century is outside the purview of this thesis. What is within its purview is perhaps to comment on the historical derivation of the current semiotic significance of dress in Malaysian business.

As has been pointed out earlier, the Annual Report serves a dual function: it is at once a persuasive document and an informative document and the success of the persuasion is contingent upon the credibility of the utterances made in the Annual Report. This contingency relationship that exists between factuality and persuasiveness relates to what Graddol (1994: 137), in another context, points out is part of the modality system, the system that establishes the authority, certainty and appropriateness of utterances:

Factuality is not merely a question of truth or lies, but a more complex semiotic system which provides for varying authority, certainty and appropriateness to be allocated to particular
representations of the world. This semiotic system is called the *modality* system. ... Factuality is not the same as modality (you can have modality in fiction, for example), but it is a key part of the semiotic mechanism by which factuality is accomplished.

This, read with Hodge and Kress' (1988:123) statement about the social construction of this system,

Modality points to the social construction or contestation of knowledge-systems. Agreement confers the status of 'knowledge', 'fact', on the system, or on aspects of it; lack of agreement casts that status into doubt. Of course, agreement and affinity may have been brought about by the relations of power-difference: that is, the more powerful may have been successful in enforcing their classifications on the less powerful.

provides a framework for explaining the role of management photographs in the semiotics of persuasion. The formal photographs of management, particularly of the Chairman, reinforce the existing social relations of power. They serve as indicators of authority, as reminders of the power conferred by professional position and superior knowledge on these individuals and in this way enforce the agreement necessary to confer the status of 'knowledge', "fact" upon the utterances of the Chairman that usually accompany these photographs.

(ii) Other Staff

The photographs of the staff of the Company serve at least two functions:
• They project the attributes that the Company values in its staff

• They provide interested others - e.g. shareholders and prospective employees - with a glimpse of the staff: their state of professional well-being, their attributes as workers.

The first function has been dealt with in some detail in the discussion of DMIB visuals in section 9.3.2. In this section, therefore, the focus will be primarily on the second function.

As with the rest of the features of the annual reports, photographs of staff are also sieved, with persuasiveness rather than informativity as the primary goal. The staff is always presented to give the best impression of the Company. When the staff are presented in their work environment they are always shown smartly and appropriately dressed: in clean overalls and concentrating on their work, if they are in a factory setting; smiling and smartly-dressed in suit and tie, if the job they are shown doing is white-collar and people-centred; in lab coats and in the presence of high tech equipment if they are in a research environment; involved and enthusiastic-looking, if they are shown in the context of training or attending a seminar. Always, they are shown to be involved, busy and in harmony with their surroundings. Although Malaysia has its fair share of industrial unrest and employee-employer strife, there is not a single photograph of this in the corporate diary of any one of the companies in the corpus on which this study is based. Neither is there a single picture of a staff member who looks discontented, unkempt or lazy. It can be concluded, therefore that the presentation of negative aspects of staff
behaviour is not a part of "allowable contributions" (Bhatia, 1993) for this genre. It is not part of the expectations of writers or readers of the Annual Report to see such pictures, implying that the writing and reading of this genre is predicated more on the assumption that it is a persuasive document than that it is an informative document, although in its historical inception, it began as a document intended to inform the shareholders of the true position of the Company. In its present form, however, "true and fair" presentation is confined to the financial sections which are subject to independent audit; the rest of the report is really a report not of what is true but of what the Company wishes to and can persuade the shareholders is true.

(iii) Non-staff

Enhancing Company image is again the function of these photographs which typically include pictures of people the Company wishes to be associated with: Ministers of State, corporate heavyweights or those likely to enhance the company’s image and people’s assessment of its future performance e.g. the Governor of Bank Negara. Some photographs are also of people the association with whom would cause the Company to be deemed a caring citizen (old folks, orphans, the blind etc) or a socially responsible citizen (e.g. one that produces environment-friendly products)
b. **Events, Buildings, Products and Processes**

Cumulatively these give the Company a local habitation and a name; they concretize and give immediacy and identity to the Company as an entity that has a life and personality of its own. AMFB 1995, for instance, has, in addition to the usual photographs of people, the following photographs: the signing ceremony for credit facilities for the G-Two Group; AMFB’s Savers’ G.a.n.g Counter; the greenery at the entrance to AMFB; the camel coin box used by the Company; the launch of an interest-free banking scheme in Sarawak; exchanging documents in an event involving AMFB’s granting of a bridging loan to a local company; AMFB’s banking hall at the Jalan Raja Chulan, Kuala Lumpur branch office; an auto teller machine, a Company official presenting a contribution to the Ikhtiar project; Family Day; Annual Dinner; 4 photographs of company-organized games; a set of brochures showing AMFB credit facilities; an educational trip organized by AMFB for its young savers.

While the AMFB images seek to sketch a quick picture of the whole company, the East Asiatic Company (Malaysia) Berhad’s photographs focus is almost exclusively on its products as Table 9.6 clearly shows:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Visual</th>
<th>Accompanying Caption</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A futuristic composite picture showing different buildings, different kinds of gadgetry and a number of different graphic designs</td>
<td>The Graphics Technology centre which was constructed in 1993 is unique in providing hi-tech facilities for the printing industry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising slogans and pictures of milk products sold by the company</td>
<td>A new image for Dumex... achieved through aggressive advertising, promotional campaigns and sponsored programmes nationwide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A composite picture of different brands of food products sold by the company</td>
<td>From an initial operation of three agencies, the brands presently handled by the Division have increased to include many world renowned agencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A family in their kitchen; the products sold by the company on display</td>
<td>The products which come under the portfolio of the Marketing Services Division (Non-Food) have become household names in many Malaysian homes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A wooden model showing arrows to Europe, Middle East and North America.</td>
<td>Timber products are exported from Malaysia to various markets around the world in close cooperation with EAC's worldwide network of companies and agents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composite picture of several products made from palm oil, a map and a chart showing the estates owned by the Company.</td>
<td>Palm oil has been used for food, medicinal and industrial purposes for generations and today, the food and non-food uses of its oil have increased even more extensively.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One variant on the photograph is a picture collage. Its function is to provide fragments of organizational life and culture, which re-create in mosaic form, an image of the company as a whole. Each fragment has a meronymic relationship to the Company as a whole in that it evokes different facets of the total image the company wishes to project of itself. In Figure 9.1 taken from RHB's 1996 Annual Report, for example, we see images of the company's achievement in the form of its ratings on the Far Eastern Economic Review's annual survey.
Innovative in Responding To Customer Needs

1. (94) Overseas Chinese Bank
2. (11) Malaysia Airlines
3. (1) UOB Singapore
4. (2) New Straits Times Press
5. (9) Malaysia Airlines

High Quality Services/Products

1. (2) Malaysia Airlines
2. (2) National Royal Hotel
3. (4) Tesco
4. (9) New Straits Times Press
5. (7) Malaysia Airlines

Companies That Others Try to Emulate

1. (54) None
2. (2) None
3. (2) None
4. (2) None
5. (5) None

Figure 9.1 Images of the Company's Achievements

Far Eastern Economic Review
January 1991

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Three statistics have been selected (possibly out of several other possible parameters of comparison) and in all three the ratings of RHB are high; they are, in fact, higher than the previous year's rating. These two features taken together indicate that RHB is not merely very highly rated but that it is improving. On the parameter of innovativeness in Responding to Customer Needs it is shown to have shot up from eleventh place in 1994 to second place in 1995 and on the parameter of High Quality Services/Products it has moved from seventh to third place. The mock-up of the KLSE Board keeps its core business as a premier capital market specialist in focus. The staff member with a phone and fax machine by her side, looking busy, efficient and focused, evokes the quality of life at RHB securities houses. A clock with Islamic numerals instead of the usual Arabic or Roman numerals is perhaps a reminder that RHB is one of the banks pioneering the interest-free Islamic concept in banking.

In summary then it can be said that visuals reinforce the images created by the verbal discourse e.g. RHB's awards. However, visuals and verbal images are complementary relationships. Where speed and essence are of particular attentional salience, visuals seem to be used. They are also used to pick up gaps in topical reference in the verbal presentations e.g. the culture of day-to-day activity - what people do routinely, how they look, what they use in the daily operations - is almost exclusively presented through the visuals which are strewn all over the Annual Report. In fact their ubiquitousness seems almost to work at an unconscious, almost subliminal, level as many advertisements do. Images that require "explanation", a cajoling into an attitudinal stance seem, however, to require discourse negotiations.
Reflection of Social Changes in the Chairman’s Report (CR)

Many social changes are reflected in the CRs. The improvements in public transport - the light rail system, the building of highways, the building of Kuala Lumpur International Airport, for example, are repeatedly mentioned. There are also many references to a capitalist, consumerist society:

(i) ...there are concerns over the country's trade deficit and rapid growth in consumption

   (RHB, 1995)

(ii) The sales of luxury range of BMW and Range Rover motor vehicles improved significantly.

   (Tractors (M) Sdn Bhd, 1994)

(iii) ...coming up with a more upmarket product complete with special grade finishes...

   (Bandaraya, 1995)

For the purpose of illustrating how social changes are reflected (and created) in the discourse of the Annual Reports, however, the researcher will merely confine herself to a discussion of the emergence of the culture of materialism in Malaysia.

The dominant note that is struck in the CRs in the corpus is one of tremendous optimism:
The Malaysian economy is expected to remain buoyant, provide trading conditions which will help sustain the continued growth of many of our Malaysian Companies.

(Johan 1992)

...to chart further growth tapping on the opportunities presented by our nation's economic and social progress

(Bandaraya, 1995)

The social effects of this economic buoyancy on the "increasingly affluent Malaysian society" (Tanjong, 1995) can perhaps be examined by closer examination of the semantic field for BUILDING in the CRs. Six of the companies in this corpus had a property development division. A listing of the kinds of buildings these companies have built, are building, or leasing is insightful:

Table 9.7 Types of Buildings Constructed by Six Property Development Companies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Residential &amp; Recreational</th>
<th>Business</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sime UEP</td>
<td>High cost link houses in PJ</td>
<td>Industrial park: industrial lots of 1 - 5 acres</td>
<td>Detached, semi-detached and terrace factories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Single and double storey link houses in Johor</td>
<td></td>
<td>A shopping complex in Klang</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bandaraya</th>
<th>Condominiums Double storey bungalows and link houses Town houses A 268-room hotel</th>
<th>Extension to Bangsar Shopping Complex Housing 100 new retail and food outlets 40 storey office tower 5-storey shopping complex in Johor housing a supermarket, a department store, a food court, a bowling alley and two cineplexes 8-level retail/commercial building in Shah Alam</th>
<th>Comprehensive public amenities including a public golf course, a sports complex, a public library A RM40 million bridge to cut travel time to the city</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pelangi</td>
<td>A Leisure Mall 16 storey office tower 9 storey office building 6 storey shopping podium 30 storey office tower Suburban shopping malls</td>
<td>Satellite township</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pemas</td>
<td>30 storey intelligent building</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kulim</td>
<td>One-acre country style homes Intelligent building</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Island &amp; Peninsular</td>
<td>706 units of low cost houses (Other buildings the main stay but not mentioned specifically)</td>
<td>No specific building types were mentioned</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three social phenomena are apparent in the data. One is the extent to which Malaysians have bought into middle-class notions of “good living”: shopping, sports (e.g. golf that is associated with the wealthy in Malaysia), luxurious homes (condominiums, for example, are associated with opulence in Malaysia: fine views, swimming pools, gyms, tennis courts, guard houses), cineplexes (small, cosy, located in up-market shopping complexes), eating-out (fast food joints like MacDonald's, Kentucky Fried Chicken etc for the teenagers; more up-market joints like Thai or Italian restaurants for the yuppies). In the dialectic between localization and globalisation, the scale

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appears to be tilting more in the direction of globalization. If the place names are removed, it would be difficult to identify what part of the world the CR is talking about. The lifestyle the buildings imply can be found anywhere in the developed world. The process of modernization and wealth creation, it appears, is moving Malaysian society towards loss of cultural identity and assimilation of the values of western capitalism.

A second point worth noticing is the near absence of homes for lower income groups except for Island and Peninsular's (I & P) building of the 706 units of low cost houses. However the inclusion of the low cost houses in I & P's buildings is misleading. The discourse in which the mention of the low cost houses is embedded in I & P and other companies' reports is more revealing in this respect:

TS 9.14
The outlook is particularly rosy for the residential sub-sector, against a background of increased purchasing power due to full employment and available liquidity although condominium demand is expected to slacken in the face of oversupply...The group however, has not forgotten its social obligation. A total of 706 unit of low cost houses and apartments...

(Island and Peninsular, 1995)

TS 9.15
As a socially responsible entity, the Company has been contributing to the well-being of the community. This year...it contributed RM10 million to the Low Cost Housing Fund which has been set up to overcome the serious housing shortage faced by the low and medium income groups in major urban areas.

(Sime UEP, 1994 in a section called COMMUNITY SERVICE)
TS 9.16

Other contributions made by the Arab-Malaysia Banking Group include donations made ...towards a Fund for Construction of Low Cost Houses proposed in the 1994 Budget by the Finance Minister in aid of the poor.

(AMFB, 1994)

TS 9.17

Responding to the country's call for the corporate participation in the development of a caring society, I am proud to report that the Company generously contributed RM10 million to the Low Cost Housing Fund in May 1994.

(Public Bank, 1995)

The discourse of the low cost houses above situates itself in the discourse about "the have" and "the have nots". Implicit in it is the image of income gaps. While the outlook is particularly rosy and there is an oversupply of luxury items like condominiums, in the discourse that surrounds low cost houses the picture that emerges is dismal. There is a serious housing shortage faced by the low and medium income groups in major urban areas. Low cost houses come under charity. They are a social obligation. Donations need to be collected for them. They are talked about under "Community Services". They are evidence of ethical (the Company contributed generously) and responsible (Responding to the country's call for corporate participation in the development of a caring society) behaviour, something that establishes the virtue of a company (I am proud to report). They are also a reason for reduction in a Company's reduction in profits:
The situation is so bad that the Government has to step in (a Fund for Construction of Low Cost Houses proposed in the 1994 Budget by the Finance Minister in aid of the poor)

The third issue not apparent in the data but one that naturally arises from it is, "Why is there such a great demand for high living? The authors of the CRs give some reasons:

With full employment, higher purchasing power, attractive borrowing rates and easier EPF withdrawal schemes, the demand for residential and commercial properties have risen substantially

What this concatenation of facts establishes is that there is higher purchasing power. What it does not establish but tacitly claims is that there is a "natural" and "obvious" relationship between higher purchasing power and the purchase of luxury items. It appears to be suggesting, "Naturally, if you have money, you will want to buy luxury homes. Who wouldn't?". In doing this it conflates two issues that are in effect quite distinct: Do Malaysians have purchasing power? What do they want to purchase with this power? The extent to which this conflation is ideological in Fairclough's sense of the word becomes immediately visible when we attempt to consider alternative,
possibly non-materialistic uses of money for example the possibility of acquiring further education for oneself/one's children/relatives/friends; the possibility of sharing one's wealth with others e.g. by paying more wages to those one employs (maids, gardeners); the possibility of one parent not working so that there is greater family coherence, more chances of better transmission of values and avoidance of the multiple social problems that young Malaysians seem to get into today (e.g. loitering, crime, drug addiction).

The fourth point to draw attention to is the fact that the demand that the CRs seem to be claiming is naturally there is in fact most probably discoursally created.

Fairclough (1989:200-201), in discussing consumerism and its location within modern Capitalism, points out:

Capitalism, in the processes of industrialization and urbanization, has fractured traditional cultural ties associated with the extended family, the local or regional or ethnic community, religion and so forth. In certain circumstances, these traditional ties have been replaced by ties generated by people in their new urban and industrial environments, notably ties of class.... Advertising is of course the most visible practice, and discourse, of consumerism, and its most immediately striking characteristic is its sheer scale.... It is on the basis of sheer quantity that advertising is able to achieve its most significant qualitative effects: the constitution of cultural communities to replace those which capitalism has destroyed, and which provide people with needs and values. Or displace rather than replace: ersatz communities are offered as alternatives to real one. These communities have been called consumption communities.
The following three excerpts are descriptions of housing projects that some of the companies in the corpus have undertaken. They are discussed here as indices of the ways in which the social processes – specifically the creation of consumption communities through the ideologically-loaded discourse techniques of advertising – that Fairclough discusses are mirrored in the corpus.

The first excerpt comes from the Kulim CR:

*TS 9.20*

*The one-acre country home concept launched under the "Green Plains" has, I believe, been able to exploit a market niche for a truly luxurious living in a clean and green country environment... it is only apt that the emphasis of future housing development ... will be towards country living amidst the expanse of green and natural surroundings.*

(Kulim 1992)

Three observations can be made. One, this excerpt is not part of an advertisement. The Chairman is not selling these houses to the shareholders who are the primary readers of the CR. Yet its diction and rhetoric are very much those of advertising, confirming Fairclough’s repeated claims (1989, 1997) that the discourse of advertising is colonizing all other discourses. Two, it functions very much like an advertisement. It claims to *exploit a market niche*, implying a market niche already exists. May be it does. But the text also reveals how such a market niche and the consumption community to occupy it are actually created through the text. Through the words "Green Plains", one acre country home, luxurious living, country living, clean, green (repeated twice), natural, expanse - it evokes a frame for the kinds of homes Malaysians
have seen in Westerns like *Bonanza* and *The Virginian*. This is certainly not traditional Malaysian country living. With the kampung houses and the fruit trees and chicken running helter skelter, Malaysian country living may be clean and green and natural. But it is not *truly luxurious*. What the text is doing, therefore, is creating the illusion of country living that is really a transposition of Western romantic notions of country living into the Malaysian imagination by offering them as the notion of country living – universal, non-culture-specific and natural.

In the second and third descriptions the reader/buyer is made to occupy the subject position of a person who wants to "stand above all others", one who knows he is rich and luxuriates in that knowledge that he can afford things others cannot:

*TS 9.21*

The focus of our residential development...was...four quadrants of high cost link houses. Each quadrant was developed into an exclusive neighbourhood with its own distinctive architectural theme. The quadrants of Casa de la Palmas, Heritage Square, Pearl of USJ and The Tudor Court provided a new development concept which created a sense of identity and belonging for the residents of each neighbourhood.

(Sime UEP, 1994)

*TS 9.22*

The popular demand (for condominiums) is mainly due to the prime location and prestige of the condominiums...and the up-market facilities and amenities provided

(Bandaraya, 1995)
In addition to evoking the notion of exclusivity, the description of
neighbourhood and sense of identity and belonging also evoke simultaneously
the notion of inclusion. The inclusion, however, is not in the lot of common
humanity. The home becomes an external symbol of the club of wealthy
people in which he is now included. It is also the means to fraternize
exclusively with those of the same socio-economic class. The market niche
thus becomes montaged onto a social niche. The naming of the homes, and
possibly their architectural design, again make the foreign, rather than the
local, the benchmark of excellence. The man of discernment (the one who can
appreciate architectural themes and can recognize heritage) chooses as his
frame of excellence in architecture foreign models of architectural design(
Casa de la Palma evokes palm-lined castles of Spain while Tudor Court
seems to suggest high living in Tudor England).

The frame these descriptions (which are possibly echoes of actual
advertisements the Companies concerned put out during the launch of these
homes) evoke of modern lifestyles is, as Fairclough concludes after his
discussion of the way an advertisement for a washing machine works,

...an ideological construct which is both used as a vehicle for
the generation of a product image, and produced and
reproduced in its own right in the process. The frame packages
together social subjects in particular sorts of relationship,
activities, settings, values and so on, in a powerful prescription
for how one should live, or at least one should acknowledge to
be the best way to live, in the modern world... By leading
people to acknowledge and pursue this lifestyle..., advertising
is helping to legitimize contemporary capitalism.

( Fairclough, 1089: 206)
9.4 Concluding Remarks

The findings of this Chapter point to the ethnographic potential of text. We see self-portraiture in the values that the Chairman foreground as the marks of excellence: efficiency, profitability, up-to-dateness. While ethnographers need to go to the site to observe the external marks of the culture of a people or a place, the business community actively choose how they want to represent the "way we do things around here". A pivotal difference between the physical site and the textual one rests on the issue of choice of representation. Whereas an ethnographer sees all he wants to see in his site of investigation, in the text world, the writers of the Annual Reports choose how they want others to see and what they want to be seen as. They provide the warrants for persuasion from a number of semiotic systems: they reveal the preferred choices by showing the actions they reward and value in the Corporate calendar; they reveal the values they "live by " through the choices they make from several overlapping semiotic systems. One of these is the visual semiotic. The choices from within this system take the form of pictures and charts, as well as photographs of people, processes, and structures. By his selection of medium of presentation too the Chairman sometimes imports into his communication certain prefabricated attitudes to media.

By choosing numerical presentation, for example, he borrows the notion of objectivity and reliability that science and mathematics have infused into numbers over the years.
Another important source of ethnographic data in the text is the kind of figures of speech Lakoff calls Metaphors *We Live By*, the often unconscious, habitual and "natural" images that emerge in the business communities talk about itself and its activities. The process of self-transformation of a nation - its values and codes of behaviour - is made visible through these metaphors.

Another important insight is the way discourse creates, - not just reflects - the world we think we want to live in.