



"CULTURAL STUDIES IS AN INTERDISCIPLINARY FIELD. IT EXAMINES TEXTS AND SUB-TEXTS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO POWER RELATIONS WITHIN CONTEXTS."

CCMS Students analyze Argus takeover

Susan Manhando

Early in 1994 it was announced that Argus Holdings had sold a significant sector of its media interests to Tony O'Reilly, a foreign entrepreneur. This deal is the latest of several concluded by Argus since the transition to democracy began in South Africa; taken together, they represent a significant departure from previous ownership arrangements, and thus serve to illustrate some of the premises political economists have developed to explain the dialectical relationship between economic and political arrangements in the media sphere.

Our study attempts to locate these latest movements in capital and ownership in the South African media sphere within a number of theoretical contexts. The deals struck by Argus Holdings in the last six months will be discussed in terms of concepts which attempt to address questions of ownership and control in media organisations, which relate control of media organisations to the role of the media in the public sphere, and which situate media organisations in the context of broader movements in capital.

In analyzing the O'Reilly deal, this summary relates issues of ownership and control to the crisis of legitimacy in the broader South African public sphere, a crisis that cannot be understood apart from the conditions of capital concentration and vertical intergration that characterize the South African economy. Criticism of the structure of ownership in the South African media derives to a considerable extent from the view that the rationalised and restricted nature of the commercial print media market limits access to, and participation in, the public sphere.

We emphasize in the course of this report that strategic movements in mining capital, initiated by Anglo-American Corporation (AAC) and Johannesburg Consolidated Investments (JCI) in defense of their interests, rather than purely those of the Press, in turn represent a significant economic determinant in the deals.

The Argus deals reveal the ways in which the intentional actions of large capital formations are shaped by the political and economic structures within which they are enacted; and the ways in which such structures are themselves reshaped by purposive actions undertaken to sustain the allocative control exercised by organised capital over economic and cultural resources in the public sphere.

Media in South Africa, at the start of 1994, were dominated by five conglomerates. These were: the SA Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), Argus Holdings Limited, Times Media Ltd (TML), Perskor and Nasionale Pers Beperk. Of these, the most powerful was Argus Holdings, which controlled significant sectors of both the print and electronic media.

The Restructuring Process

The first phase in the unbundling process came with Argus Holdings sale of 52% of **The Sowetan**, the largest daily newspaper in the country, to a black-owned consortium, headed by Dr. Ntatho Motlana and linked to Thebe Investments, an ANC dominated business grouping. However, Argus still owns a 20% share in New African Publishers (75% of which is owned by Corporate Africa), a 42% interest in the newspaper title, as well as printing, advertising, and management contracts for the paper. Thus, it is evident that Argus still has effective control.

The second phase in the restructuring process was the acquisition of 31% of Argus Newspapers for R125 million from Argus Holdings Ltd by an Irish company, Independent Newspapers (INP), headed by media magnate, Tony O'Reilly. Other important allocative controllers of Argus Newspapers include Old Mutual with 13% and Argus Pension Fund with 8% of the shares. It has been speculated that O'Reilly will go after pension fund holdings or Old Mutual interest to secure outright control.

The third phase in the restructuring of press ownership was the erasure of TML's and Argus joint holdings, except

for those in distribution and printing. For R61-million, Argus bought out TML's 30% interests in Natal Newspapers and the Cape Joint Operating Agreement, its 45% share in Pretoria News and the title of the Cape Times. Whereas previously Argus exercised management functions, while TML exercised editorial control, Argus now has full control of both daily Cape Town papers.

The effect of the restructuring deals is that there are now two distinct groups in the English press: O'Reilly's Argus and Anglo-JCI's Times Media Ltd. The final link between Anglo and the South African press will not be severed after the new government takes power, despite claims to the contrary, because of the significant holdings JCI and Argus Holdings own in TML because Anglo-JCI no longer command the heights of the English press; however, a close examination of what O'Reilly now controls reveals that press monopoly still exists, and has

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Visual Voice ConFest '94 widens UND's cultural horizons

Mikhail Peppas

The Visual Voice Festival Conference was held at the University of Natal, Durban from July 24 to July 30. The Confest covered a wide range of interests with the focus on the cultural dimension of visual communication. It included the Fourth International Oral Tradition Conference, the Ethnographic (Inter-cultural) Film Festival, and a first for South Africa, the Conference on Communication for Development.

More than 100 delegates attended from as far afield as Japan and France. Presenters hailed from most of the Southern African countries, Australia, New Zealand and France.

Events opened with an "Informal Friday" under the title of Communication and the Community. To set the tone Helge Janssen performed the Dance of the Red Bull, an exotic, guttural and gestural piece of ancient movement, with stamping and hypnotic grunting symbolising the mythical bull. This was followed by a keynote address from the poet laureate for Africa, Mazisi Kunene titled "Gifts from the Great Continent", focusing on African cosmology and what Africa can offer to the rest of the world.

Dr Jane Meyerowitz (Computer Science Department) and Dr Maurice Mars (Medical School, University of Natal) offered a spectacular glimpse into the future with a stunning demonstration titled "Multimedia" – interactive computers, animation, sound, video and talking books. Laura Cloete of Wits Television Services, gave an update of international multimedia developments. Some strong criticism was voiced by several delegates about the increasing use of multimedia for teaching anthropology.

Presenters included Andy Mason of Artworks, Ros Sarkin of the Durban International Film Festival, Tim Quinlin from the Institute for Social and Economic Research, UDW (Community Video), Adi Paxton (CCMS – Gesture, Dance and the Imagination) and Fafa (Greetings from Tekweni to Kilimanjaro).

Film screenings included Ethnographic Film – **An Interview with David Turton, Umkhumbane – Cato Manor Whose Land? Whose Memory?**,

the premiere of **Artrage** (Kamscilla Naidoo), and a powerful student film **Hot Feet**, a first attempt by Heli Guy who had never held a video camera before this production.

The keynote speaker at the Ethnographic Film Festival was the renowned French anthropologist and filmmaker Colette Piauxt, Research Director at the CNRS in Paris. Colette also conducted an ethnographic film workshop which proved so successful that plans are being made for a return visit.

Visual Voice hosted the first meeting of the Community TV Forum, which initially aims to set up a TV station on the Durban campus of the University of Natal, and then assist with Community TV stations in the Rural areas. The Forum was attended by Tracy Naughton (the 'Mother of Australian Community TV'), and visitors from Johannesburg, including both FAWO and the Community TV Consortium.

Another idea motivated at the Confest is the plan to establish a film museum in Durban which would have a bookshop, screening room, educational facility and a coffee bar. The Film Museum Group aims to link-up with numerous international film organisations, including the Frankfurt Film Museum, Facets Multimedia Cinematheque (Chicago) and the Film/Video Centre (Atlanta).

A new film and culture magazine titled **Visual Voice** is being prepared by the DTP students at the Centre for Cultural and Media Studies at the University of Natal.

The theme for Visual Voice '95 is Inter-cultural film, Semiotics and Orality. The Confest will take place in the last week of June and has already secured a number of presenters, including David Turton of the Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology at Manchester University, and Professor Teshome Gabriel of the UCLA Film Department.

For further information about Visual Voice '95 please contact the coordinator, Mikhail Peppas, at the Centre for Cultural and Media Studies, University of Natal, Private Bag X10, Dalbridge 4014, South Africa. Phone (031) 260 2505. ■

Holidays are fun

Adi Paxton

I had the pleasure of participating in three recent conferences/festivals. Firstly, as a speaker at the Visual Voice/ Orality Conference at the University of Natal (24 – 30 June '94). Then as a solo performer in my own show at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown (30 June – 10 July) and finally as an observer at the conference on 'Knowledge, Method and the Public Good', hosted by the HSRC in Pretoria (18 – 22 July).

National Arts Festival – Grahamstown

With the advent of the 'new' South Africa many people were expecting a Festival that went totally beyond the bounds of any of previous years. While such expectations could not always be met, there was a distinctive Buzz and with approximately 250 events per day an often bewildering number of choices to be made. As a participant, performing on the Children's Fringe, it was an exhausting, exhilarating and ultimately profitable and stimulating experience. One of the most memorable performances was that of Marius Weyers in **On the Road** a particularly intense play that questioned the value of 'civilisation', and such things as Art, Religion and Knowledge in the face of destruction and death.

'Knowledge, Method and the Public Good' Conference

One of the major preoccupations in South Africa presently occupying the minds and hearts of intellectuals and performers alike at all the above gatherings seemed to be where to locate South African-ness, in terms of both where to position ourselves within the new SA and where the country fits into the world. A major philosophical re-examination seems to hinge upon the first/ third world relationship.

While some believe the world should give SA resources for upliftment, there were a reassuring number who felt it is possible that in working out a solution for ourselves we will be providing a valuable example for the rest of the world. Laudable and reassuring as the latter view may be it would be tempting fate to ignore how far we still have to go. ■

The 16th Durban International Film Festival flared across the dark limbo of Durban's cultural life in July this year. The inauguration of South Africa's new democratic era, which has finally allowed the nation to re-enter the international fold have significantly ruptured the closed sphere of public consciousness, widening the horizon of possibilities for free expression in the arts.

The Film Festival organisers were courageous in taking advantage of this enlightening moment, bringing a range of powerful films which probed the boundaries of social taboos in their depiction of sex and violence.

Violence on the screen provided some furore over the event, with several extremely violent films being shown. The Festival's opening screening, New Zealand director Lee Tamahori's **Once Were Warriors**, set the tone for the ensuing three week long festival with its disturbing portrayal of domestic violence.

Tamahori and his producer, Robyn Scholes, were present to talk about the film and answer questions from the audience. The filmmakers argued convincingly that their depiction of violence in the film, with Tamahori's conscious distantiating from American

Durban Film Festival Flares Into Life

Mike Aldridge

methods of depiction, was not gratuitously motivated, but was central to the story which the film revealed.

More blood 'n guts movies followed, notably Geoffrey White's **Romper Stomper** about neo-nazi skinheads, and Quentin Tarantino's **Reservoir Dogs**, another film in the great tradition of American violence.

Sex sizzled on the big screen in Nagisa Oshima's classic **In the Realm of the Senses**, which concerns an intense adultrous affair conducted between two mutually obsessed lovers. One of the most remarkable aspects of this Festival was the effect of the above films on Durban audiences, who walked out in droves. Evidently cloistered Durbanites are unable to bear the impact of images so different to the usual timid blend of titillation and coyness which mark the run-of-the-mill culture industry products.

This inability of audiences to deal with subversive film was also evident

with the screening of Derek Jarman's sublime subversion of cinema codes, **Blue**. Seventy six minutes of unrelieved monochrome visual stimulation left Durbanites cold, and the mastery of Jarman's final filmic statement was appreciated only by those who remained to enjoy the experience.

The Festival showed a number of other daring and innovative movies, along with some offerings of the mainstream culture industry. One hopes that the crassness of Durban audiences will gradually be overcome with the continued screening of such radical movies.

One jarring note of the Festival was that despite its staging at the University of Natal's Sneddon Theatre, the plight of poorer students was ignored. Student discounts were given only for day-time screenings, and since not all movies were shown at these times, students were faced with the choice of either not seeing some of the best films, or of having to cough up the full price for evening shows.

We hope these problems will be resolved in the future. ■

Stills from the movie *Romper Stomper*



Visual Voice reviews Festival

The widely circulated Draft copy of the the *Visual Voice* included an extensive preview of the 16th Durban International Film Festival and will feature an overview of the Festival in the special Launch edition.

Visual Voice now has a film review panel which will particularly examine local and African films but will also update filmgoers about international trends in inter-cultural movie making and multimedia. Eventually the entire magazine will be available on computer disc and be accessible on the Net.

Visual Voice, in conjunction with the Durban Film Festival, hosted a workshop at CCMS which focussed on the riveting New Zealand film **Once Were Warriors**, the film which opened the Festival. Director Lee Tamahori and producer Robin Scholes gave a fascinating account of the making of the film and were challenged about the excessive violence and the depiction of the Maoris as a despairing society steeped in alcoholism.

As part of its outreach programme the Festival screened **Once Were Warriors** in the townships where it had a great impact on local audiences because of strong parallels with the situation in South Africa. ■

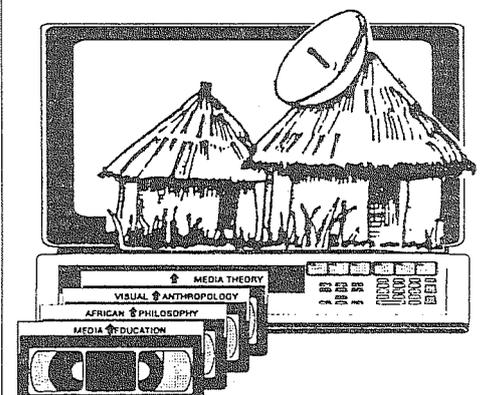
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Visual Voice Conference: Through a Grey Viewfinder

Alex Holt

Videoing a conference for record purposes is physically taxing work. The cinematographer has to be able to keep his/her eye glued to a grey video screen for long uninterrupted sessions.

And it usually turns out to be a one man show: you have to carry heavy equipment, set up lights, and during teabreaks or lunch stand guard so that equipment doesn't disappear. Sometimes, due to space constrictions, it is difficult to suitably locate a tripod. To capture the sense interaction the camera often needs to be handheld so that your lens can swiftly settle on different participants. After a few days of this regime you might feel your concentration lapse: the camera will momentarily shake or hesitate to frame accurately a new speaker.

But the grey view does not seem detach or remove one from the interaction. One is hyperaware. If the proceedings are in your area of academic interest you will be mentally recording and assessing the information being related. So you are listening all the time and using one free eye to spot changes in action and direct the lens to where it seems appropriate.

And what if a presentation contains audio visual material or a short film screening? A record of this component is needed if you want to bring future viewers as close as possible to the experience of what a conference was like. Fortunately, a modern VHS camera is able to capture these dim images too.

After a while you become stereotyped as the 'man with the video-camera'. This is not so bad because you become less self-conscious and more invisible. One of the biggest problems is sensitivity that your presence might somehow disrupt the proceedings or intimidate some of the speakers. This can restrict you from jockeying to where you feel is the optimum camera position or from setting up your lighting the way you feel it is really necessary. Each day you hope that sweat and hard work have somehow compensated for any compromises you have made.

If you manage to make it to a tea session or lunch, people will tell you that you haven't said much, and they will want to know why you are videoing them. You reassure them by extolling the great virtues recording a

conference: for a start, copies of presented papers might be available but what about the responses generated? Sometimes incipient ideas which a speaker might not have quite articulated trigger off a unique and valuable input in a conference environment. Some may even say that they are glad that you missed videoing them the

A Song for the Festive Season

With suitably contemporary-cultural lyrics



Given the time of the year during which this issue of **SubText** is being issued, it seems appropriate to celebrate both the season and the contemporary-cultural interrogation of symbols by offering readers our own topical version of one of the more frequently played songs on middle-of-the-road radio.

Of course, one ought not forget that there will be at least one occasion upon which somebody who stars in a TV sitcom or soap will also perform this ditty on a "Night of the Stars", looking a real nana in the process. We figured we'd have a go at pre-empting any such running-dog capitalist misappropriation of symbols ... what the hell, it's that time of the year, so here's our new intellectually post-something version of **The Twelve Days of Christmas** (omitting the whole sequence ... saving space, of course):

On the Twelfth day of Christmas my true love gave to me:

Twelve Expanding Meanings
Eleven Gender Symbols
Ten Textual theories
Nine Infinite Semioses
Eight Social Contexts
Seven Cultural Memories
Six Suppressed Texts
Five Structured Absences
Four Methodologies
Three Problematics
Two Paradigms
and
A Partridge in a Pear Tree

With apologies to both composer and readers...

Arnold Shepperson ■

day when they spoke as they would have been very nervous. But that might not be really true as people tend to adjust quickly to having the lens beamed at them – it may even stimulate them and give them energy. Others might corner you and demand to know why the camera wasn't present when they presented 'their' paper? The truth is that you didn't have three assistants and after four days you need a break even from one of the greatest thrills available. ■

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possibly been further strengthened. INP controls nearly 40% of English weekend newspaper circulation. Following the Competition Board's ruling in favour of the transfer of the Cape Times title from TML to Argus, O Reilly completely dominates the print media markets in Cape Town and Durban, and is by far the market leader in the PWV region.

When we consider these deals in the context of economic ownership and allocative control, the complex relationships between AAC, Argus Holdings and emerging political interests represented by the ANC are highlighted. The Anglo American Corporation has for many years dominated markets in nearly every sector of the economy. In order to counter criticisms that Anglo exercises monopoly control of the media market through cross-holdings and subsidiaries, and following renewed debate about over concentration in the economy generally and the media in particular, the notion of "unbundling" entered corporate discourse. Originally, this term referred to an international business trend in favour of leaner and more efficient corporate organisation, but in South Africa it has been deployed by AAC as a way of addressing the over concentration of resources in the SA economy. The in-house task force created by Argus to consider the unbundling of its newspaper holdings is clearly an attempt to use changes in ownership and control of the press to answer political charges levelled as much against Anglo-American-JCI as against Argus itself.

This project was conducted by Andrew Aphane, Lisa Bold, Nikhil Bramdaw, Saijal Gokool, Donald Guambe, Belinda Harward, Susan Manhando and Dennis Young under the supervision of Dr Ruth Teer-Tomaselli. ■

Sub Text production: Mike Aldridge