

# Can SA Culture be CURED?

by Arnold Shepperson

The Centre for Cultural and Media Studies (CCMS), largely ignored by state-supported research bodies in the Old South Africa, finds its credentials receiving serious notice with the evolution of the New. Among parastatal issues dealt with by Centre staff since 1994 are telecommunications, arts and culture policy and broadcasting.

The Human Sciences Research Council's (HSRC) paper on Cultural Reconstruction and Development recently came to the centre. Our experience with this is emblematic not only of the shift in the way parastatals operate. It is also characteristic of the ways in which the Centre has had to shift its focus.

In the past, critical theoretical operations like CCMS have had to operate in a reactionary way. After April 1994, we have found ourselves having to make positive contributions to the business of government, where previously our focus was on resistance to government. This rather novel situation has meant that we have had to reassess what our stance towards the state ought to be. In the remainder of this article, I will talk about this in relation to the HSRC's CURED project.

Most cultural debate in South Africa has followed one of two lines. On one side, 'culture' has been the target of Left intellectuals because of its anthropological meanings. In other words, we were very aware of the use of Culture by the state as a means to bolster arguments for racial separation. The other line has followed the 'High-Low-Popular' Culture polemic. In this approach, culture is associated with some definition of Taste, and we usually approached these discussions from the point of view of the political economy of symbolic production.

In less intellectual terms, we dealt with the latter approach first by seeing just who owned or subsidised what in the field of

*CURED(kew-réd): Cultural Reconstruction and Development (acronym). Human Sciences Research Council project aimed at creating policy positions on cultural issues in the New South Africa.*

media and artistic activities. Secondly, we would see how to encourage those excluded by existing ownership or subsidy systems to go about producing 'culture' for themselves. Generally, the reputation of CCMS is most commonly associated with our work in media and performance.

### *Taste impositions*

To the extent that the CURED proposals coincide with our previous work, they are in line with the second line of cultural thought. However, while this approach was a useful one from the point of view of anti-apartheid activism in the fields of media and popular performance, we very quickly found that it was not so easy to draw upon for positive action about policy. If we are to create policies which dictate Taste, then no matter how close to The People these may be at first, they become impositions for another generation. We simply could not square this with the idea of a democratic society.

We decided to narrow down the overall approach so that certain basic requirements could be met. The first requirement was the issue of economy. What kind of policy, we asked, would get the most bang for the buck? Secondly, we had to look at the effectiveness of cultural policy in the democratic environment. What, we asked, would be the approach which would uplift the least-privileged people here and now over the longest possible term. Finally, who are these people in cultural terms?

Besides being undemocratic, the Taste approach was too clumsy: what kind of Art would do the trick? Most important from our point of view was the question of benefit: who would get the most from basing cultural policy on this kind of theory?

In the present environment of media globalization, we concluded that the entertainment industry would be the only long-term beneficiary. What did make sense, however, was a different approach to the anthropological conception of culture.

The CCMS policy framing paper developed the idea of Culture around exactly what the original meaning of the word was: to nurture, tend, look after, and live in a place. We re-read the work of cultural studies scholars. It was clear that this aspect of culture had received attention largely in terms of English experience: issues of class pervaded the material, and gender questions focused mainly on media and economic representation of

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# Promoting PEACE through Video

by Kubeshni Govender

The concept of the **Community Video Initiative** was born out of a relationship between the PEACE Foundation and the Centre for Cultural and Media Studies. Communities that are involved in development projects funded through the PEACE Foundation, are given the opportunity to participate in the initiative which aims to 'empower' its participants through the facilitation of a process-driven video production course, geared toward the documentation of the life experiences and histories of the participants and their communal ties.

## *Visit to the North*

In October 1995, I joined a party of business people and university academics to the Northern Province to lay the groundwork for the project. Visiting the people and communities in the area served to consolidate the basic concepts of the Community Video Initiative. Of special mention was our visit to Mujaji, the Rain Queen (where the PEACE Foundation's plans for the communities in that region were explained to the Queen and her party). Victor, a councilman, expressed interest in the community video initiative and gave me the name the of "Mamogadi", meaning 'mother of a member of the royal kraal'. This was an im-



portant breakthrough as the consent and willingness of the people in the region was needed to secure the prospect of the video initiative.

## *Empowerment*

The underlying premise of this project is that through the full participation in the process of video production that the participants will be 'empowered'. According to the methodology of this project this could occur in the following ways: In an economic sense, participants having acquired video skills, will be able to undertake shooting weddings, funerals, birth-

days as a source of income. On a more social level, video is used to encourage collective decision making and group work. Individuals are urged to reach a level of altruism that would find them willingly feeding into their community, using their skills for a 'social good'. The last stage of the Community Video Initiative is geared toward transferring the responsibilities of facilitation to the original participants who will assume the role of 'facilitator' in teaching new recruits in the project. Thus the process aims to regenerate itself through training even after the initial intervention of the facilitator.

## *The satellite debate*

# Digital vs Analogue

The launching of the PAS4 satellite over South Africa in August 1995 means that everyone in South Africa can receive television and radio signals with the aid of a 90 cm dish.

In light of the importance of this technology, on the third of November 1995, CCMS and Natal University's Electronic Engineering Department hosted a debate between Sentech, suppliers of analogue satellite technology and Orbicom, distributors of digital satellite technology. Sentech is at present wholly owned by the SABC, but is in the process of establishing it-

*from an article by Susan Manhando*

self as an autonomous public enterprise. This process is aimed at establishing Sentech as a common carrier for broadcasting signal distribution in South Africa. Orbicom on the other hand, deals with all the signal distribution of pay television operators such as M-Net, both in South Africa and Africa. Its capacity extends to the areas of terrestrial transmission; satellite distribution and direct-to-home broadcasting; multi-channel digital compression; cable and other means of distribution.

The debate addressed the issue of whether the satellite signal should be delivered through analogue or digital technology, or both. The primary purpose of the debate was to analyse how the technicalities of analogue and digital satellite technology impact on the consumer in terms of apparent and hidden costs and quality. After both sides presented their case, it became evident that for the next few years, a combination of analogue and digital technology will be used by Sentech, while Orbicom pursues an exclusively digital road.

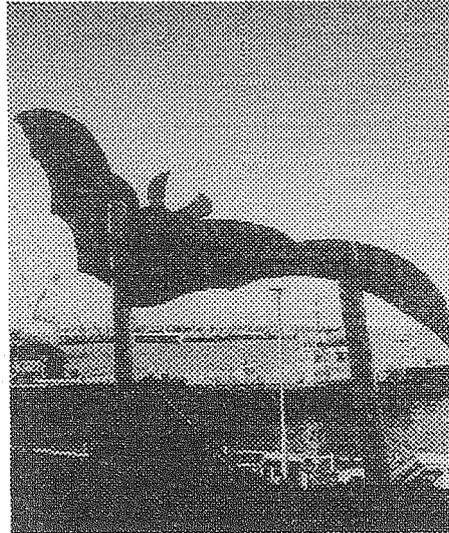
# Information technology needs assessed

by Mike Aldridge

CCMS has initiated a project aimed at investigating the role of information technology in community cultural empowerment processes. The project is being undertaken as part of the HSRC's CURED (Cultural Reconstruction and Development) research programme, under the leadership of CCMS Information Technology lecturer Mike Aldridge. Using the Bartel Arts Trust (BAT) Centre as an example of a privately funded community arts project, researchers will investigate the role which telecommunications and information technology plays in the centre's activities and outreach programmes.

The project's underlying assumption is that communications are essential for building a healthy and vibrant society. Researchers will also investigate the needs of other community arts centres in the greater Durban region with regard to telecommunications and information technology.

Needs assessments in the above context will aid the Human Sciences Research Council in evaluating the Reconstruction



The BAT Centre on Durban's harbour-front.

and Development Programme requirements for developing telecommunications and information technology infrastructures which are necessary for implementing such facilities in community centres. In the long term, this could result in a programme to set up community information centres to provide both access to information as well as the dissemination of information through media, both print and electronic.

Telecommunications and information technology requirements will be assessed in relation to creative, recreational and reconstructive activities. Cultural needs within identified communities will be assessed in order to understand how relevant technologies can be used to promote community participation and to service community information requirements.

The research programme will involve the key role players in both the BAT Centre and the community arts centres. The central methodology will entail interviews with these personnel, as well as with other role players as and where they are identified. The programme will provide an information base on which future projects can be built, which could include strategic planning, training and community ownership of the ongoing process.

This research programme will help the BAT Centre to fulfill its task of serving the cultural needs of creative communities in the greater Durban region. One component of this will be the compilation of a data base of creative people within the Greater Durban region.

## CCMS links to Aussie

Professor Ien Ang, previously director of the Research Centre for Culture and Communication at Murdoch University paid a three day visit to the Centre in November this year. In a seminar presented by Professor Ang during the course of her stay, Professor K.G. Tomaselli, director of the Centre for Cultural and Media Studies at Natal University, announced that Professor Ang was in Durban not just to give a seminar, but to finalise a series of linkage arrangements that she and Professor Tomaselli had been negotiating for the three or four months. Professor Tomaselli said that he was pleased to announce that a normal linkage arrangement is now in place between CCMS and the Research Centre for Culture and Communication at the University of Murdoch in Perth.

The first joint project will be Murdoch University coming in as co-editors of the *Critical Arts Journal* produced by CCMS. In this way, it is hoped that relations between the two centres will rapidly expand. The purpose of the linkage is as follows: "Development and promotion of research collaboration in areas of mutual interest, exchange of academic materials, exchange of scholars, sponsoring co-operative seminars, exchanging research students [this all of course depends on the money]".

Professor Tomaselli described the proposed collaboration as "a very exciting development which increases the capacity of both organizations in a synergetic kind of way which is not really possible if you continue as separate entities".

## Centre for Cultural and Media Studies Courses

### Postgraduate degrees

CCMS now offers a revised two-year integrated curriculum with a strong professional and research orientation covering the Honours and Masters degrees in media studies.

**Academic courses:** qualitative approaches to cultural and media research; sociology of media; and democracy and development; political economy of the media and visual anthropology. Further options are available.

**Professional skills courses include** video production, information technology (DTP, Hypermedia), advertising, statistical methodology. Internships and research projects are included.

**Entrance requirements:** A good undergraduate degree in any discipline. Entrants with Honours degree in cognate areas will receive course credits at the discretion of the Director.

CCMS also offers a supportive environment for PhD study.

# Bold & Beautiful SA?

*The soap South Africans  
can't stop watching*

by Michelle Tager

At 5:30 pm Monday to Friday on CCV, thousands of South African viewers tune into the world of the wealthy and powerful Forrester family, around whom the storyline of *The Bold and the Beautiful* revolves. South Africa is not the only country to get hooked on this soap opera. *The Bold and the Beautiful* has a viewership of 200 million people, spread across more than 80 countries, including Egypt.

While the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) formulates policies which are aimed at ensuring through legislation that a certain percentage of television content be made up of local programmes,

## INVESTIGATE!

Jeff Stein, a freelance investigative journalist from the United States, presented a seminar *by Michelle Tager* entitled "The Collapse of Investigative Newspapers' Journalism in South Africa". Stein and Paul Denig (also from the United States) were in South Africa to give guidance to journalists at the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). According to Stein, South African journalists have lost touch with the art of investigative journalism.

Stein contended that the journalists he had encountered, were satisfied with receiving information via fax machine, and showed no desire to investigate, to check their sources or look for alternative angles to a story. Stein laid the blame for this apparent apathy, at the door of apartheid. He argued that under the old apartheid regime, the freedom of the press was severely curtailed, and journalists feared for their safety if they adopted alternative opinions to those propounded by the apartheid government.

Stein was of the opinion that journalists in this country are still labouring under the aftermath of apartheid, and that until they free themselves from the oppressive yoke of the past, they will be unable to practice genuine investigative journalism, which is far more difficult and challenging than the kind of reporting that they are currently practicing.

South Africans appear to be entranced by American programmes like *The Bold and the Beautiful*, and are not keen to see local television productions on their screens until such time as the quality of said pro-

ductions improves considerably. As one viewer put it: "[South African] actors are still sort of trying to learn, and we don't want pay TV licences and watch them trying to act on TV".

## Curing SA Culture

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women. But in anthropological terms, the people under consideration remained citizens of settled industrial societies.

For South Africa, we took as our starting point one of the most significant constituencies: women who singly and collectively head households in urban and peri-urban areas.

Here we had concrete agents of nurture and looking after. They presented a good demographic 'hook' upon which we could confront the questions of 'how much?' and 'how many?'. We then asked: what is the object of the activities of nurture, tending, and so on? From radical philosophy<sup>1</sup> we took the answer: taking people born into the world and raising their endowments into talents.

This unlocked the whole debate. We could look at cultural needs, a primary focus of CURED, in concrete terms. Women raising their children have specific needs, and they can articulate them. The talents which can be seen as undesirable can be readily identified against the simple radical criterion: does a talent require people to be held in subordination?

This way of approaching policy enabled us to set up guidelines not only for the target communities of cultural reconstruction. We were also able to use it to separate the different kinds of activity relevant for local, regional and national policy formation.

At the moment CCMS is setting up a pilot research project based on this approach in the Durban township of Lamontville. Issues to be addressed will include: library services, transport for schoolchildren, facilities for pre-school activity, primary health care, school feeding schemes, and similar issues. These appear far removed from traditional notions of 'Culture'. Yet the absence of such services and facilities are fundamental hindrances to the activity of raising people's endowments into talents suited to an industrial society. We have simply recognised the fact that it is the women doing the nurturing and looking after, who are the primary agents of culture in any culture: cultural policy should therefore start with them and stay with them.

<sup>1</sup> Agnes Heller: *Beyond Justice*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell. 1987.

## Choosing languages on the SABC

by Munyaradzi Hwengere

The SABC's best solution to meeting its mandate as a public service broadcaster would be to establish a strong tradition of regional broadcasting. Each regional broadcaster could concentrate on the language of the region.

This would alleviate the present situation where the national broadcaster is obliged to programme in all 11 official languages. Catering for all languages leads to fragmented scheduling and, more importantly, it exerts unbearable pressure on the SABC to use its three television channels for 11 languages.

But the SABC seems reluctant to follow this route. At present only four provinces have broadcasting facilities and it is expensive to set up regional units. There is also a concern that regional broadcasting would entrench separatist tendencies which is contrary to the forging of a new South Africanness.