My time as an intern with ARROW SA: Art, Culture & Heritage for Peace was an enlightening and gratifying experience. The diverse group worked well with each other and I was astounded at the ability of the students to organise within themselves different team leaders and delegate specific roles.

Each session would open with a discussion concerning topical themes, for example the London riots. The debates concerning protests, surveillance and police presence in the UK allowed the students to compare their situation of living in a South African city with those in Europe, drawing upon the similarities and differences in politics and culture.

ARROWSA, whilst firmly dedicated to their specific cultural exchange projects, is committed to individual appraisal of each student's personal extra-curricular and academic achievements. The Peace Forum Project, in which 2 students were taught the effect of one's carbon footprint, would then relate to the wider themes of ARROWSA's musical production of 'The Bridge'; a romantic narrative concerning the protection and conservation of the environment and natural resources.

The current productions of 'Oliver' combined with scenes from 'Annie' and 'Sarafina' displayed an inter-textual array of themes concerning slavery, liberation and the poverty associated with urban dwelling. The youth group improvised each scene through song and dance, showing a strong support and negotiation of each social actor’s ideas. The literary content was adapted to suit Durban appropriate settings and mixed songs of English and Zulu to create an original, culturally diverse performance piece.

Furthermore, the students are focused in their team building exercises due to the overwhelming desire to attend a trip to the Kalahari Desert. Fund raising initiatives included bracelet making and weaving led by myself. The repetitive action of knotting and plaiting allow the students to focus on small scale tasks, facilitating their subconscious to freely roam. With such an interesting goal, each learner is motivated to generate funding for the trip. The initiative helps to focus the projects and create exciting ideas in which the group can raise funding and awareness of their projects in cultural exchange.

Juno Fitzpatrick, King's College London, was an intern observing the ARROW SA Bechet group.
I N THE NUTS (Unground) (Other than Groundnuts) Order the expression nuts shall have reference to such nuts other than groundnuts, as would, but for this Amending Order, not qualify as nuts (Unground) (Other than Groundnuts) by reason if their being nuts (Unground)” (Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1956, published in Daily Telegraph, 3 April 1956).

By Keyan G. Tomaselli

Semiotics – which bills itself as a ‘method of methods’ - was the organising theme at a recent Faculty of Commerce, Administration and Law, University of Zululand (UZ), research indaba. Titled “Restructuring for Relevance”, I was a conference guest, at a forest lodge in Mtunzini. I talked about what money signifies (sign, myth, symbol/ideology) and how some accountancy departments teach accounting via Cultural Studies as a means of explaining how social, economic and political power is managed. “Money makes the world go round” sings Liza Minnelli in the film, Cabaret, but its meaning is often lost on student accountants, we learned. If the Humanities study meaning, the bean counters tabulate the loot, then why not mix the two to create a critical discipline of semiotic accounting? Such an approach would research how money comes to mean, how it makes meaning, and how can it be interpreted discursively. A R100 note, in semiotic terms, ‘stands for’ something else (value, status, happiness, greed, power, exchange, patriotism, etc.).

UZ’s dean Nan van den Bergh, applied semiotics and legal pragmatics as a way of facilitating a common vision, from the perspectives of the different disciplines. His own analysis of the above incomprehensible legalese regarding what appeared to be British legislation on “Unground Nuts” (but not groundnuts, peanuts, tree nuts, coconuts or male ‘nuts’) was instructive. His analysis parallels the meaningless jargon and logical inconsistencies generated by Key Performance Area (KPA)-speak that substitute aims and objectives with output indicators and GIGO (garbage-in – garbage out).

KPA JARGON pretends that academics can be no more innovative than workers on a factory conveyor belt. Here, all-powerful ‘line managers’ ensure that intellectual workers don’t spend more than regulation time in the toilet or thinking creatively about their work least the output-measured production-line units...
be compromised. Indeed, just filling in KPAs itself becomes a self-fulfilling KPA. The conclusion of the nutty professor was that the legalese under analysis was a hoax, authored by an anonymous journalist. This is how myths emerge. Myths, as second order signs, take on the appearance of truth. But myths are utterances without utterers/authors. They exist in and of themselves, irrespective of what is. It took a full study by van den Bergh to arrive at this conclusion. I hope he will now study academic KPAs also, which may turn out to be the satirical creation of a Mad Magazine cartoonist under the influence of something or other.

Indeed two such (serious) papers on KPAs were presented. A key criticism related to implications for academic freedom, while another was concerned with how to assess intellectual creativity. One influential paper in a high impact journal may be worth a thousand in low impact titles. The question still to be researched is what do KPAs mean to academics, academic work and academia itself. One speaker did examine the lack of ‘deep learning’ amongst accountancy students whose opportunistic aim is to simply pass the requisite exam (surface learning). The discourse of ‘line manager’ in the academic environment is a surface learning reductionism of deep learning practices, as should be engaged in by all students and staff. At the level of management, in what way, for example, can an unrated associate professor with few publications, and no national disciplinary presence, be the line manager of an A-rated senior professor with a global research profile?

In a global environment where deans have been often reduced to being bean counters in the service of a new political and/or economistic project, this UZ dean offered refreshing leadership, in the FACT frame of one of the speakers, enabling F(airness) A(countability), C(ompromise) and T(ransparency). This approach locates individuals as ends in themselves rather than solely as means to someone else’s output objectives. This is known as the Kantian Imperative. In any event, that’s what the speaker concluded was the intention of the Employment Act of 1997. How come, then, that we all feel like slaves to form-filling and as mere means to someone else’s ends?

At UKZN, the recent Productivity Unit (PU) calculations now combine the individual staff member’s PU’s (a really unfortunate acronym) with that of his/her student’s achievements. This conflation is crucial, as it admits that research is best done in apprenticed partnerships, by teams and via systematic mentoring relationships. It also identifies which staff are engaging in redress and who are reproducing the next generation of young scholars. The contradiction, however, is that NRF committees penalise this approach, whereas NRF Focus Area grants require it. Only the former – the individualists – are therefore likely get an A rating.

The ANNUAL Humanities Graduate Conference at UKZN, like the UZ event, integrates students into academic practice. This is where students test their presentational skills, develop self-confidence, and get a real sense of academic practice - which is not measured by Higher Education Information Management System (HEMIS). It is also often the first time that they actually meet their peers in common spaces. This kind of interaction is the basic building block of any R&D environment. In our own Centre, students get to practice their presentations in front of their peers before presenting at conferences. The confidence gained, as I have recurrently witnessed, sees students having the confidence to critique professors’ papers, often to the latter’s abject bewilderment. Where the senior professors often wing it at disciplinary conferences, students work at it. When the students become professors, no doubt, they too will wing it, as they won’t have the time to research it. Too many forms to fill in, too many admin hoops to jump through, too many auditing distractions. In one of our externally funded projects we now enter the time it takes to fill in the monitoring and evaluation spread- and time-sheets. Filling in forms thus becomes one of the self-referential outputs measured.

“There are no consequences”, is the explanation I was given of why the UZ meeting started late on the first day. I joked about discussing the semiotics of time, digital, analogue, polychronic and space-time relations. Yet a technical paper on KPAs indicated otherwise, suggesting that employee demoralisation or poor line management as a possible reason for inadequate performance. But this does not explain why the bus was an hour late on the first day and early the next. As one newcomer to UZ stated: unpredictability is the norm. Indeed, KPAs encourage the lowest common denominator in self-regulation. UZ, amongst some other SA universities, is thus dumping KPAs. If the bus is late we’re all late. The specificity of language required by legalese is lost in the semiotics of nannying. In this scenario, it matters not whether or not the bus arrives on time, or whether we’re nuts, natters or nutted –that is, KP-ayed.

The problem with KPAs, as the discussion developed, is that HR consultants - who have no idea what academics actually do - have developed indicators to measure outputs, rather than aims, achievements and impact, whose results are used by equally clueless auditors to measure their imagining of academic performance. Yet, the academics do not get to measure the performance of managers or the executive who are
supposed to support this sector. The latter simply award themselves bonuses no matter their performance, whereas the rest of us have to fiddle the KPA scores to survive the ordeal. This may or not be the case in reality, but the national survey results of one of the studies presented (that offered an alternative based on a “balanced scorecard model”) revealed that: “Anything would be better than current systems”.

Achievements of the indaba were: a) development of a Faculty-based research community that includes students; b) creation of a site where emergent academics can test their papers on their peers, for presentation later at disciplinary conferences; c) Faculty support in preparing the papers for publication (adding the lipstick and mascara, to round them off, as Nan put it); d) creation of intra-faculty peer-support mechanisms – there was no grandstanding, no divisive competition, no points scoring, no judgmentalism, no hectoring, no pulling rank.

At UKZN, few Humanities undergraduate students – other than in Sociology and Psychology – study research methods, and even fewer, the philosophy of science. I tell our School’s students that even if they pass summa cum laude, they are still under-educated, as usually the only research method that they know is the one they applied in their thesis. They are oblivious to the hundreds of others that could be used. The Faculty of Humanities Graduate Office has over the past two years addressed this lack and runs research and supervision workshops for staff and students. This is one of its successes.

The UZ event was a great success. We know this because the turnout on the second day was exemplary – delegates didn’t come just for the gala lunch. Enthusiasm, cooperation and professionalism – and some humour and enthusiasm, cooperation and collegiality. Economists were their own best critics. As the head of research at the Reserve Bank, Dr Rashad Cassim, put it: coalesce in the tea room, create teams, talk to each other, go for blue sky and curiosity-driven research, but also offer policy research. Make your work relevant and challenge government orthodoxy.

Not being a lawyer, commerce or administration/politics lecturer, though I once did teach business communication to very rowdy and maniacal students at a Durban tertiary college, I nevertheless found the event fascinating, relevant and engaging. But, then, I am an academic maverick. The objective of semiotics is to foster transdisciplinarity. In this, the event was clearly successful. One speaker revealed that he knew nothing about semiotics or advertising, but he did know about beer, and so he talked entertainingly about spoof advertising on Windhoek Beer in relation to market share, costs and places of consumption, and viral marketing. He even circulated a short story on tavern drinking culture written by a Wits industrial sociology MA student. Numbers are not all; how meaning is made is key. A drinker’s comment in this thesis on the value chain on shebeens that beer is “a drink so perfect, a drink our ancestors could never even imagine … ever”.

A laundring pad has been created for the UZ Faculty as a whole. I am reminded of the once dodgy car hire firm, Tempest, now top of the branding pops, ‘No frills, just good value’. The paper on Windhoek concluded that satire is part of viral marketing – after all, Black Label is now the top-selling township beer notwithstanding the Laugh It Off spoof (‘Black Labour, White Guilt’) that resulted in SAB foolishly trying to restrict the space for satire and social commentary. That would be a disaster for the Nando’s TV campaign. When chicken, social commentary and media cohere, man, now that’s the kind of postmodernism with which I can identify.

The conference started with a paper on non-verbal communication in the legal arena, something anybody who watches law dramas on TV should take for granted. Seems not. South African lawyers rarely, it seems, learn from TV. Maybe they just don’t watch TV. Economists, said Cassim, have largely lost the art of popular writing as they play with complex models. It’s now largely left to Nobel Laureates to talk in accessible language with ordinary people through newspapers. Absorptive capacity is an issue – reports and studies are not read because policy makers are unable to read (due to time, lack of education, application, stamina, disinterest etc). So, because policy makers rarely read anymore, they don’t respond and react. Good academic work decays even if it does sometimes earn SAPSE points. We need to escape the obscure terminology of ungrounded nuts legalese and communicate our work much more effectively to the general populace.

My job was to popularise semiotics as a transdisciplinary research method in an accessible and challenging way. If academia is the beer that should be handled with care and love, why are we pissing this intrinsic value away with instrumentalism management systems like KPAs? As the mentioned study reveals, if drinkers in shebeens can reflect intelligently on their consumption, then how can the academy learn from such grounded experience and devise intelligent systems of pro-actively ensuring performance? Who would have thought that a discussion on nuts, matters and nutted could have been so fruitful? This is known as semiosis – one sign gives rise to another sign that gives rise to another sign, and so on. KPAs restrict signs, they close down semiosis. As academics, our practice should be an open-ended semiosis of the curiosity-driven variety. Thanks Dr Cassim, for reminding us of this imperative. Perhaps he should be giving a lecture to HR divisions to remind them of this?
There is good reason for the quote by De Lamartine. I was enthralled by the vitality and beauty of the city: its cinematographic skyline; street traders selling anything from millet to ‘original copy’ branded clothing to richly ornate Ottoman carpets; restaurateurs beckoning you to dine on the diverse cuisine on offer; passers by saying “merhaba” (hello); the call to prayer from the enchanting Blue mosque; tea sellers; car hooters; brightly coloured shop windows displaying coffee and Turkish delight (and yes...Burger King).

**By Lauren Dyll-Myklebust**

One does not need to visit a museum to encounter the history of the place. It is in its landscape and architecture that can be seen around almost every street corner: the glimmering Bosphorus and the Golden Horn connecting Europe and Asia, the Topkapi Palace, Hagia Sofia and the Grand Bazaar. Istanbul was the setting for this year’s International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) conference held at the impressive Kadir Has University. Its theme, *Cities, Creativity and Connectivity*, was perfectly suited to be addressed in a city like Istanbul. As Deniz Bayrakdar (Dean of the Faculty of Communication at Kadir Has University) wrote: “As one of the oldest cities in the world, Istanbul has been home to various civilisations, cultures and religions, connecting them together and bridging two continents. Ancient and modern live side by side in this exhilarating city.”

Prof’ Teer-Tomaselli, Prof McCracken, Wandile Sibisi and myself set off for this megacity with two objectives in mind; secure the bid for the 2012 IAMCR conference to be held in Durban (along with other members of the local organising committee) and present academic papers and network with the ‘who’s-who’ of media and communications research. Prof McCracken presented on British Military intelligence correspondents in the South African War (1899-1902), and in true style had the entire audience enthralled in what he was saying interrupted with fits of laughter in response to his jokes (in spite of the fact that most of the audience were melting in the hot July summer and lack of air conditioning). Prof Teer-Tomaselli and my presentation that explored the potentialities of mediated cosmopolitanism as a research methodology was presented in the Political Economy Section, and was relevant in terms of this year’s conference where city, movement, culture and identity all impact on and are impacted by cosmopolitanism.

The bid was successful and next year UKZN and the Southern African Communications Association (SACOMM) will be the proud hosts of the IAMCR conference with its focus on *South-North conversations*. This theme “reflects the asymmetry of communication flows but without implying the negatives that accompany discussions of the ‘digital divide’.

The formulation foregrounds issues of communicative empowerment of the positive potentials of media and communication in the processes of development...It is particularly interested in exploring the different modalities of communication, media flows, associated identities, images and perceptions; as well as information technology transfers from differently-situated regions of the globe. In this way, we hope to not only focus on topics close to the concerns of the host nation, South Africa, but also to a range of regional interests across the globe” (SACOMM-UKZN, 2011). I’m looking forward to next year’s conference!
ON THE 17th of June 2011, at seven o’clock in the morning, we gathered at Professor Keyan Tomaselli’s house in posh Westville to travel to the not-so-posh Northern Cape, for a long exciting research trip that was to inspire and inform my Visual Anthropology Research project. I must admit that I was apprehensive as I didn’t know what to expect or how things would unfold - I’m not one who enjoys not being in control of a situation. However, as we travelled in our convoy of 4x4s, I began to relax as I got used to alternating between dozing off, chatting to Prof Tomaselli and my fellow researchers, and adjusting my tolerance levels for Prof’s classic rock music that played incessantly. This trip might be out of my comfort zone but I was determined to embrace it.

One of the most interesting topics, for me, was Varona Sathiyah’s presentation on the representation of the Bushmen in tourism. She challenged the assumptions I had about ‘Bushmen’ and their lifestyle; ideas that had come through television adverts, pictures or even documentaries. I was confronted by the possibility of Bushmen representation as constructs with intended (commercial) objectives. The concept of authenticity reared its head and went on to become a highly debated topic afterwards. Authentic? Maybe. But, for what purposes? The intellectual energy that filled the auditorium that morning awoke in me a fresh thirst for knowledge and new ways of thinking.

After such an invigorating discussion, Petrus, a young black tour-guide who spoke in English with an Afrikaans accent, took us around the heritage site. I remember walking through the dry, long grass and seeing an old worn down building. Suddenly, nothing felt familiar to me, it was like I was a stranger in a foreign land, with people that valued drawings on rocks not only as part of their heritage but also their indigenous identity. They had strong pride in it even though they knew that there are people who say that the ancient people who drew the drawings might not even have been Bushmen. This strong belief in ones indentity is the opposite of my environment where my peers embrace technology as part of our daily lives, express our indigeneity in a haphazard and ambiguous way through social networking sites like Facebook, Mxit, and Twitter and where our identity is seen as an individual, commercial and publicised construction of expressing one’s self. I immediately realised that this was going to be a life changing, eye opening and informative experience.

At this point I was eager and impatient to lay my eyes on at least one ‘authentic’ Bushman as it was getting late. My camera
was ready and I waited in anticipation for my first gaze at this person who, for almost my whole life seemed to be an unreachable, untouchable being who lived out in the ‘bush’ somewhere in the world. Ironically, our very own tour guide was a Bushman. He claimed this naming with pride. I was not sure whether I still wanted or needed to take a photo because he looked, bluntly putting it: normal. He probably goes on Facebook and Mxit with his Blackberry - just like me. He was not the Other I had imagined. His Other-ness was more in my own head. Had I been the one who had been deceived into fixing the Bushmen in the past with images and a priori assumptions? I thought I would recognise the Bushmen without hesitation with their loin cloths, half nakedness and hunting gear, but I was proven wrong. Going back to the Hadida guesthouse, I needed to discuss these observations and the meaning of all these things with my friends Lungelo, Claudia (from Germany) and Sofia (from Greece). As we debated and negated the days events everything began to start making sense if only due to the fact that nothing seemed to make much sense.

Unlike Durban, the nights in Kimberley were freezing and thus one had to have an early night’s sleep. Tom, however, gave us the luxury of touring Kimberley’s CBD at night while looking for fast food shops – a world much closer to Durban’s bright lights than the Bushman’s scarcity-stricken world a mere 15 kilometers away in Platfontein.

Early in the morning, we travelled to different museums from nine till late afternoon. The day was interesting because it revealed in detail the history of Northern Cape, Kimberley to be specific, which was a good example of South Africa’s history of colonialism and marginalisation. Our next visit was to the Big Hole Museum. After searching frantically for my student card at the pay counter at the Big Hole, I realised that I had left it at the guest house which meant that I had to pay full price instead of student discount. But I wasn’t going to let extravagant prices make me miss seeing such an important piece of our history. The museum focused on the discovery of diamonds in Kimberley and was very insightful and eye-opening, especially when one took note of all it’s historical gaps and information which is left out. The movie, which is screened as an introduction to the tour, was a significant aspect of the tour because it evoked some important thoughts about the distribution of wealth, ownership, power relations and inequality as well as racial prejudice.

A depiction of an antelope etched on a rock
and the effects of such issues which are still rife in the present day.

Next on the list was the Sol Plaatje museum and library. Learning about this important South African intellectual was fascinating and we were given a copy of a book containing a collection of his work. Being in Kimberley brought about an awareness of the different vantage-points existing in South Africa. It reminded me that history is not confined to what we are told by others but is something to research and experience for a broad, well informed perspective.

Upon arriving at Molopo Lodge, in the Kalahari, I could think of nothing else but a shower and a bed, after a full day’s journey from Kimberley to Upington, we were exhausted. The lodge was beautifully constructed, and the atmosphere had a calming sense to those of us who were far from home. It was nearly 5:00 pm and we had to wait for the rest of the team that we had left in Platfontein doing further research. Waiting meant preparing the group’s meal for the night, not very exciting after a long, tiring journey. We had a quick braai and all gathered around the fire as Nyasha, my Zimbabwean tutor/supervisor began to cook his long awaited pap, or Sadza, for the team while Varona made soup and then Tom and I tried to get the boerewors done. At the arrival of the rest of the team, food was dished out and we all sat around the table in the dark with two lamps that lit up the space and made us look like conspirators. This was a time where we all reflected on the time spent and work done in places like Kimberley, Platfontein and so forth, and slowly everyone excused themselves to go to sleep; we were all tired and had a long day ahead. Staying at Molopo Lodge was both exciting and uncomfortable. If I thought Kimberley was extremely cold, Molopo was freezing - and we got the full brunt of the icy air on our nightly walk to our rooms which were out in the bush, about 300 long-pitch black metres away from the camping site which we used as a meeting place.

It was at Molopo that I had time to share space and time with my fellow researchers. Due to the nature of the research trip we all went from being mere colleagues to friends who can work together. Suddenly I had to shift from the comfort of having ‘me’ time, to trying to find myself within a large group of multi-racial, multi-cultural researchers (Indian, White, Black, Khomani, European, African, Coloured) from different places around the world (South Africa, Zimbabwe, Australia, Scotland, Greece, Germany, and Botswana) and of different age groups. A feeling of uneasiness and self-consciousness began to creep in and I started feeling a bit vulnerable. I thought to myself ‘I haven’t prepared myself for this’. I was being forced to share my space with all these Others, and to accommodate them. Although I didn’t know what I could have done differently, I just knew that this was going to be the longest two weeks I’ve ever had in my life. It seemed as though the rest of the people were not experiencing the rush of these feelings like I was. Lungelo, a close friend of mine, on the other hand is one person who is able to easily welcome people into her space; so I guess it was time for me to learn to be both independent and also dependent on others. After all, we had to work together in a way. It was time for me to adapt to the situation but also express my individuality.

I was excited to learn more about the modern Bushmen culture while at Molopo. From my experience of being around the
Bushmen in Platfontein, I got a sense of what to expect in the Kalahari. I realised that the Bushmen are no less different from me as I am from a colleague from a different culture. But I kept feeling like there was something unique about these Bushmen at the same time. What was it? Let me say that there were two types of Bushmen that I was introduced to through everyday engagement with the South African San Institute (SASI). There were, firstly, the Bushmen who felt a strong need to preserve the traditional signs and icons of their culture and indigeneity, also known as the 'Traditional' Bushmen. These folks mostly preferred to be seen as authentic. For them, there was something good that could be saved from the past to help build the present and the future for their children. It seemed that they did not want to go to 'modernity' but wanted to let 'modernity' come to them. Another group make their living through embracing modernity. It was interesting to hear about this difference because it answered some of the questions I had acquired through simple observation, such as why a certain area in the Kalahari seems to be poverty stricken while another looks and seems 'modern' and to be coping well, according to our Western standards. We visited locations such as Witdraai and historical war sites, where Belinda Kruiper, her husband Oeliset and the rest of the family educated us about the present state of their land. This family seemed open and welcoming to new researchers, although it did fascinate me why they've opened themselves up to be studied and researched – something I will explore in my Visual Anthropology Research paper. Why are they 'happy' to be researched? Is it ethical to allow others to research you? At this point in time I felt like the Anthropological Other was the one researching us - since they planned to be researched by us, on their own terms. We were their audiences and they were the actors. We had come all the way from Durban to be performed to. I also began to realise that one will always be the Other in another's eyes.

I might not remember in detail every aspect of this trip, but because of photos and the video diaries that we made every two days, one will be able, through piecing together things with the help of the fertile imagination, to go back to that lived experience of meeting and sharing space with one who is called the Other. I might not have understood it clearly then, but I realised that I had found myself doing ethnographic work unknowingly. These encounters have truly triggered a desire for me to write and express the power of engaging in participant observation because the idea of difference is bridged when one engages with what one says is the Other. After all, culture is indeed a lived experience, a day-to-day process. Thus to understand someone else's culture we are required to be observant in the process of what becomes known as their culture, and which, through a shared heritage also is our culture.
In the realm of the senses at the Durban International Film Festival

LIFE IS AN AMALGAMATION of our experiences and each experience, a collection of particular thoughts and sensations. In the case of film, we tend to define them by what we saw, heard and felt; what we have experienced. Is a film then defined by its particular make up or by the things it lacks?

By Timothy Biggar

Many in the world of the auteur, the abstract thought and the artist would define Hollywood film, and as well as its international associates, to be lacking of any higher order characteristics. Critics argue that the industry of film has stunted creativity, evolution and uniqueness. Yet I would argue that this critical and academic obsession with overly complex narratives, direction and the abstract has equally stunted the artistic film and film in general. I have started my review this way because many an audience are quick to judge artistic films as ‘arty farty’. ‘Arty farty’ encompasses many of the issues the artistic film needs to overcome. In fact, before seeing even a single film at this year’s Durban International Film Festival (DIFF), I had felt the same way. Happily however, I was wrong and upon leaving my final film of the festival, credits rolling, I had formed new opinions and ideas. This is a review of the festival in general, as well as a look at the idea and execution of artistic film in general.

DIFF gave its associated groups, and Durban in general, a flexing of cultural finesse and inspired creativity, motivated in proving Durban can do more than talk the proverbial talk. The 2011, DIFF had marked its 32nd year and certainly made for one of its best thus far. This year, in what seems like an effort to balance both local and international film, DIFF screened local, international, documentary, short film, surfing film and the prescribed feature length films quite equally. This was not only obvious in the lengthy and well-rounded choice of films from which to choose from; but in the audiences as well as styles of cinematography, thematic topics and the subtle nuances presented within the films. This continuous move forward demonstrates a general evolution in both the event as well as of the medium itself. An evolution, I would argue, that is especially pertinent when film, in this day and age, is so heavily threatened by newer mediums such as the Internet, video gaming and Internet TV.

What I noted most within this year’s films, was a move away from a prearranged obsession with convolution and overly arty cinematography in favour of a truer, more spontaneous, narrative as well as more idealised themes. The premise that all cinema nouveau, as well as other artistic formats, need complexity for the sake of being complex seems a little backward. Instead, stronger and more audience-friendly plots were evident. The understood ‘feature film’ may have very repeatable and overly reused, almost cliché, cinematography styles, generic plots and themes. But in order to differentiate themselves from one another, they establish stronger more unique and well defined narratives; whether fiction or non-fiction. They account for cultures and identities within their audiences and appeal to these.

At this year’s DIFF, films like Eternity and Tree of Life seemed to integrate and substitute the values within, an undoubtedly successful Hollywood blockbuster formula, with artistic flair. A more pronounced identity and individual aesthetic difference among the many directors who took part was clear. Gandu on the other hand, a film created in India, took the indisputable (and decidedly aged) rule of dance and song within Bollywood film and used that as the key platform for expression of the new. In doing so, Gandu demonstrated a postmodern take on its energetic and musical roots that resonates with the current spur of social and economic development as well as a cultural evolution within India. Not only did it comment on the new life of India forming atop (yet honing) the old, Gandu looks at the new identities and potentials for the people of India through globalisation and an extra-cultural relation with the rest of the world. This is indicated by the protagonist male character Gandu, who struggling with poverty, parental entrapment and desire for him to work by seemingly uncaring parents; he wants to become a famous and successful rapper. Gandu also seems to announce the protagonist’s parents as representations of the old, who partake in nothing but sexual activities; a potentially strong criticism to these.

In the realm of the senses at the Durban International Film Festival
Certainly explain why many of the other teens of his age resent and insult him. They fear the new identity of Indian’s youth, a natural reaction to what’s new and potentially unsafe. Moreover, the only other person who seems to get Gandu is a male around Gandu’s age and who has already adopted an identity beyond India. All of these things, Gandu does exceedingly well. Yet it manages to do so without being overly artistic and philosophical. Instead, Gandu uses popular music (both rock and rap) as well as other popular globalised themes and so crafts a thoroughly enjoyable film.

Thailand’s Eternity presents a stark contrast to Gandu, yet this quieter and more intentionally poignant film, delivers just as strong a message. It deals with a man’s life, subsequent death and the dealing of such a tragic event by his family. Its style and narrative echoes with Thailand’s current mix of beauty, tourist popularity and an outsider’s preconception of tranquillity (the man’s proverbial life) with the political as well as social unrest within the country (signalled by the realisation he is dead). The film’s lack of a discernable sound track beyond its diegetic sounds amplifies the life and times experience portrayed by the film.

Although one might criticise the film for lacking much in the way of elaborateness of style or its particularly slow tempo and pace; it would be misplaced criticism. Eternity’s almost sluggish narrative that takes time to comprehend reinforces the notion of a slow (almost uneventful) life within rural Thailand; as portrayed in the film. Furthermore, the scooter scene, to which the father rides from one side of the screen to the other, symbolises the rat race of life within impoverished environments. Yet the happy disposition of the scene reflects the contentment found within the simplistic lifestyle. In the final scenes, the family are shown to have moved to a relatively busy town; where their lives have seemed to improved; both emotionally and economically. This is potentially a comment on Thailand’s need for economic and social stability; regardless, it was an interesting and strong way to conclude. Much of the movie is hard to appreciate without being able to appreciate its simplistic narration and a purposefully uneventful plot. Though its strong aesthetic value, found within the breathtaking vista shots and colourful palette, somewhat ease the burden of a slow film.

Tree of Life, and in relation to its counterpart films, was a large budgeted behemoth. At every turn, it made sure to flaunt its Hollywood stars, CG effects, strong cinematic presence and well written narrative. Tree of Life tells the story of a common 1950s American family who struggle with the realities of life and death. It’s surreal and experimental take on the usual Hollywood design allows for compelling characters and a believable story; all the while pushing the edge on the usual Hollywood formula. The film uses carefully created CG sections to narrate and depict the big bang and subsequent evolution of the universe, Earth and end of the dinosaurs. These depictions are supposed to emphasise the enormity of creation and both the significance as well as insignificance of life; particularly as a human. The strong aesthetic character and powerfully moving sound accentuate the emotional highs of birth of and lows of death within the family. It’s tale of a boy who feels lost in the world and whose parents only really get this after his death as an adult, resonated surprisingly strongly; despite my never experiencing the same circumstances. This, and other similar emotional experiences, serve to demonstrate Tree of Life’s well written and easily appreciated story. Unsurprisingly however, and as is the case with many an artistic film, the artistic CG sections of film were too much and lost much of the audience. They were too elaborate and out of place for the story it was trying to tell. As a result, Tree of Life’s narrative and direction appeared to push art for the sake of art yet fortunately it never goes so far as to become a bad film. If anything, Tree of Life demonstrates that you cannot retrofit the Hollywood formula with the direction and process of an artistic film. Rather, the film needed to appreciate a whole new style of direction from the very beginning.

Something pleasing to note however, and as a sure sign that South Africa is on its way to a strong position in the world of film, were the brilliant and award winning films from South Africa. Skoonheid, Eldorado, Dirty Laundry and Dear Mandela show our potential and a degree of pedigree that I hope the rest of Africa is able to achieve in the years to come.

The times and locations of many of the films strongly favoured any feature film that was predicted, from the word go, to bring in audiences. Yet many of the smaller films, the films with some of the most unique voices and holistic styles of cinematography, went mostly unseen. Audiences and acquaintances commented that the times of the potentially sleeper hit films, the underdogs, go wholly unnoticed because they’re shown at too obtuse a time, and I’m inclined to agree. If DIFF wishes African films to thrive and contend for audience appeal; they need to be able to compete with films like The Tree of Life, Nader and Simin and Skoonheid.
I also asked if they had funding for the five Kalahari participants of the Biesje Poopt project. They did, and so the group was also invited and the conference organisers were prepared to pay their travel costs but, due to the cold weather all over the country, the group decided to rather stay at their fire. I was disappointed especially when I saw many other indigenous groups represented at the conference. The rest of the Biesje team were also missed namely Keyan and Lauren (CCMS), Roger (UP), David and Koot (Mc Gregor Museum). Liana, from UCK, made an effort to escape her lecturers and it was good to see her in our presentation audience.

I was excited to attend especially when I saw the line up of speakers reflected a large number of authors on my bookshelf. The ‘groupie’ in me was roused as I remembered how in my early rock art days when I was smitten by Lewis-Williams and Dowson’s trance theory I shyly asked them to sign one of their many books that I bought at the Wits rock art centre. It was interesting that the “shamanistic” theory was mentioned only once or twice until the final paper by Anne Solomon who ironically once more drew attention to it.

It was rather intimidating to be included in such a national and international line up but Prof Tomaselli told me that they would be boring and we would ‘wow’ the audience. I was particularly interested in the rock art trends but found the oral

Words and photos by Mary E Lange

I also asked if they had funding for the five Kalahari participants of the Biesje Poopt project. They did, and so the group was also invited and the conference organisers were prepared to pay their travel costs but, due to the cold weather all over the country, the group decided to rather stay at their fire. I was disappointed especially when I saw many other indigenous groups represented at the conference. The rest of the Biesje team were also missed namely Keyan and Lauren (CCMS), Roger (UP), David and Koot (Mc Gregor Museum). Liana, from UCK, made an effort to escape her lecturers and it was good to see her in our presentation audience.

I was excited to attend especially when I saw the line up of speakers reflected a large number of authors on my bookshelf. The ‘groupie’ in me was roused as I remembered how in my early rock art days when I was smitten by Lewis-Williams and Dowson’s trance theory I shyly asked them to sign one of their many books that I bought at the Wits rock art centre. It was interesting that the “shamanistic” theory was mentioned only once or twice until the final paper by Anne Solomon who ironically once more drew attention to it.

It was rather intimidating to be included in such a national and international line up but Prof Tomaselli told me that they would be boring and we would ‘wow’ the audience. I was particularly interested in the rock art trends but found the oral
narratives, linguistic and even the archive papers all compelling. The great challenge of trying to fit our group’s presentation into 20 minutes was made more difficult by the pressure (rightly so) of indigenous groups that the conference be multi-lingual. Thus the abstract was translated into Afrikaans at the beginning of our time slot, cutting our presentation time down to 15 minutes. We achieved this by writing and rewriting - or in my case improvisation and re-improvisation and then rehearsing over and over, timing ourselves as we went. Come the presentation date Shanade kept us within the time by queuing us to shut up with a click of her pen. It felt as if I had just started speaking when time was up and I handed over to Shanade. Miliswa and Shanade’s presentations were flawless and Shanade’s professional approach to the format and content of the PowerPoint was a great asset. Numerous people congratulated me on how polished and professional the paper’s presentation was.

Highlights for me were many and included: our CCMS connection with the indigenous people and how the San Council, who had given us such a hard time in Upington about the Biesje Poort project and their exclusion, became allies in the promotion of Afrikaans in the proceedings. I relished the fact that David Morris’ work of twenty years ago is now becoming the focus of other academics’ attention; and I noted, with interest, that the Water Snake, or forms of it, now features strongly in research. I was chuffed that Sven Ouzman believes that our paper was one of a kind as it does not matter what the research results are because the importance of the methodology is significant enough. I thoroughly enjoyed meeting people, such as Ansie Steyn, again with whom I had lost contact with but who were instrumental in my initial interest in rock art. I also loved meeting the people with whom I have only previously had email contact (e.g. Jeremy Holland). I was surprised to meet a folklore researcher from Spain who owned mine and the Eiland women’s book on the Water Stories.

The film session on political events and the //Khomani and the central Kalahari park was fascinating especially as the film makers and SASI’s Roger Chennels could update us on what had happened subsequently in and to the relevant communities showcased in the films. I experienced an extremely nostalgic moment whilst sitting at the beach front at a street cafe at Mouille Point next door to the house where my grandmother lived and I had spent many many December holidays; I loved seeing how excited Miliswa was at visiting Cape Town for the first time and Shanade at meeting David Lewis-Williams. The fun of Miliswa and Shanade’s company, the luxury of staying in the Murison’s flat and the beautifully planned and executed conference by Pippa Skotness, Janette Deacon and Thomas Cartwright all resulted in an interesting, very enjoyable and memorable conference. Thanks Prof Tomaselli and CCMS.
A bracing walk in the crisp Drakensberg air is an uplifting experience for anyone.

The mountain setting of the conference centre

Photo: Verona Satiyah
QWA QWA WAS ONCE a remote Bantustan in the eastern corner of the Orange Free State. Now the reincorporated territory hosts a bustling town adjacent to Witsieshoek Lodge, a rundown facility located at the intersection of KwaZulu-Natal, the Free State and Lesotho, that on three sides gazes on some of the most spectacular mountain scenery in the world. Currently under refurbishment by Transfrontier Parks Destinations (TFPD), the Lodge has also become a research site similar to !Xaus Lodge, on which CCMS students have worked in an action research capacity, sensitively shaping marketing and cultural outcomes as they go.

By Keyan Tomaselli

Varona Sathiyah (MA) is working with Prof Donal McCracken on its history and how the new owners, the Batlokoa community, relates to it, and what it means to them from a historical perspective. This is another example of how to take a lost cause and make it work, even in defiance of business sense. TFPD turns development failures into successes – in both human and financial terms. It does this by creating a matrix of strategic partnerships that go way beyond normal business networks, assumptions and practices.

On our second visit we drove for four hours to lunch at the Lodge, and then participated in a public lecture at the Free State University Qwa Qwa campus. The event started with some rousing choral singing, the national anthem, and a packed auditorium which hosted the Minister of Tourism, senior politicians, state officials and UFS academics, the CCMS party of five, and others from a variety of institutions. On inquiring about the whereabouts of the Chief Director of Tourism, I was enthusiastically welcomed by a Departmental representative, Mpume Similane, who was a student of a University of Johannesburg (UJ) communication colleague, Colin Chasi, with whom I had recently edited a book. CCMS’s publications are read wide and far, they told me.

We were addressed by the dozen of cultural tourism studies, UJ’s Milena Ivanovic. Cultural tourism occurs, we were told, because people want to learn about other cultures, self-discovery, spirituality and not just escapism. This is cultural tourism via the factory of meaning (museums, historical sites, monuments). Culture differentiates countries, where globalisation has resulted in making most other things the same. 300 million cultural tourists are circulating the globe. Most are youngsters who have a very limited knowledge of histories of the sites they visit. The attractions do not speak for themselves. The interpretation thus needs to be mediated. Tourism sells the experience but individuals tell the story. Only 12% want deep learning experiences, but with regard to SA, it’s about 20%. Entertainment Education plays a role in the 37% of international tourists who are interested in cultural encounters.

The panel of 6 experts from various universities reiterated Ivanovic’s arguments. Culture was however used unproblematically, as if it exists in and of itself, bounded. Culture is always different, and contentious in the representation of its ‘authenticity’. Cultural tourism products often lack credibility, and if so, tourists can’t empathise with the experience. Social capital needs to be well developed, mobilising communities shared projects as is the TFPD model.

Where Qwa Qwa was once off the beaten track (even a Garmin GPS cannot find it and directs you the opposite way) now it will host annual seminars on tourism, and the multiplier effect of the lodge will benefit its surrounding communities. So, having driven 365 kms for lunch at the lodge, participated at the conference, we then travelled home on the same day/night. Way to go…
Whose time is it anyway?

W E WAKE UP at a.m., and go to bed in the p.m., some daring beings wake-up in the a.m. having gone to bed in the wee hours of the a.m. There are only 24 hours in a day, we consume about 16 hours and the hit the sack for the remaining 8 hours, at least that’s my modus operandi. We tackle each day in the hope of being productive and industrious.

I’m from Pietermaritzburg, a city which has its fair share of Victorian buildings and our city hall has a magnificent clock tower which chimes every 15 minutes, and on the “o’clock” it does a little jingle for the hour time-piece as we know it today - a historian, wrote about the portable consuming us? consuming the hours or are the hours is: who is consuming who? Are we which percolates with every passing minute we work for. But, the pertinent question autonomous grip. Reminding us whose time conquered, an hour wrestled from one’s semi-workhouse manager; he discovered that time belonged to the time. Thompson wrote that the keeper and dispenser of the power. Although who wielded time had all it also.

Edward Thompson a British Marxist historian, wrote about the portable time-piece as we know it today - a fine piece of mastery whose reliability and accuracy was developed in the 1700s to be the keeper and dispenser of time. Thompson wrote that time belonged to the workhouse manager, he who wielded time had all of the power. Although employees sometimes saved-up to buy their own time-pieces, and subsequently discovered that their ‘time’ was very different from the workhouse ‘time’, they dared not bring up this discrepancy. This dovetails Michel Foucault’s work (in my sequence) on Punish and Discipline, where he explores the political investment of the body (Eighteenth century Europe saw the human body entering a machine of power that explored it, broke it down, and rearranged it). Through institutions like schools, hospitals and military camps, the body was rearranged and ordered, echoing the stomach in and chest-out lament of Bhiki Cele. Our consumption of time thus becomes determined by the institutions around us.

In primary school, lessons were a mere 30 minutes, we got to high school and they became 50 minutes, undergraduate studies lectures were 40 minutes, with an occasional double, and now in post-grad, seminars run for two hours (Have mercy!). Institutions have conditioned us to consume time into digestible chunks.

Our time has been organised for us, but I won’t go as far as calling myself a cog in the machine yet, moving to a particular regimented tempo purely and utterly predetermined for me, or am I just a fool for granting myself autonomy and complete agency?

The Tag Heuer slogan goes ‘History begins every morning’ and Karl Marx once said ‘man makes his own history’, but the question still remains: to who does time belong? And whose history begins in the morning? Do our micro-lived-histories compare to the macro-grand-history? Do we still have autonomy and total agency over our time-pieces?

So, I ask again, whose time is it anyway?

By Simphiwe Ngwane

“The enlightenment discovered liberties, but, it also invented the disciplines”, Michel Foucault

The moving hand will be round again, soon!

16