

# THE TIAKENI REPORT

## Behind the first step

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Date 5th June, 1981.

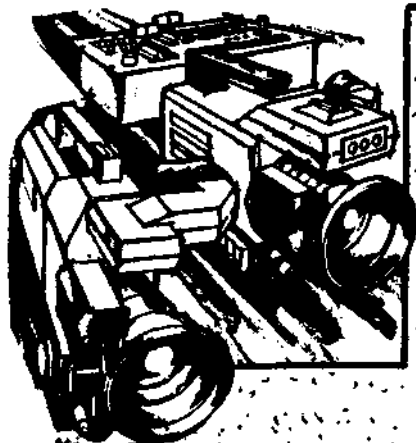
Dear Professor Horner,

re: Students' Film Projects

I remember Professor Wagstaff mentioning on Senate how useful it had been to have groups of your students doing their film-making projects on aspects of her Unit's activities. I have lately come across a couple of opportunities for similar efforts, which would be most exciting and socially very useful, which I should like to ask you about.

Friends of mine, Rob and Anne Collins, set up a couple of years ago, and now are advisers to, a thriving textile-printing co-operative called Tiakeni, near Elim Hospital, some 50 kilometres from Louis Trichardt. Some thirty Gazankulu citizens, mainly women, now own and run the operation, which has a turnover of several thousand rands per month in silk-screened textiles, sold both here and abroad.

Rob and Anne were most interested when I reported Professor Wagstaff's remarks to them, and thought of at least two kinds of short movies which would be invaluable in their efforts. One would be a piece aimed at foreign donors, to persuade them to support extensions to the present scheme (which hitherto has been largely funded by the German Churches). Another would be aimed at a quite different audience, namely black people in other rural areas whom Rob and Anne have been visiting in order to enable them to set up, beginning on a much more modest tie-dyeing basis, something similar.

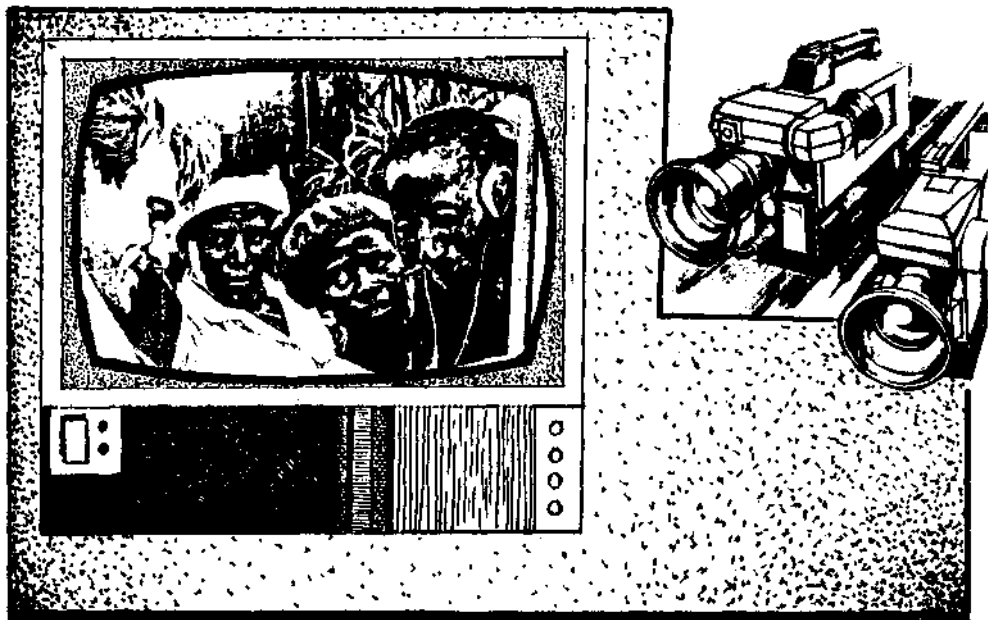


Do you think these would be suitable efforts for a couple of groups of your students to undertake? The locale, which is spectacular; the activity itself, which has facets from making and wood-cutting the design through printing and baking to distribution and sales; and the participants themselves, including some most lively, impressive and fluent black women; all seem to me to lend themselves ideally to such a treatment. Rob and Anne could presumably motivate to their present donors for a contribution towards the costs, and would be delighted to help with the conception, the script, and wherever else they can. What they cannot afford, of course, is a full-blown commercial treatment.

When you have had a moment to think this over, I'd be most interested to hear your reactions; and if it is favourable, to put you in touch with the Collinses to start talking about timing and logistics. If you don't find me in my office, please don't hesitate to leave a message on Ext.654, or to ring me at home, 726-6495.

Yours sincerely,

F.M. Orkin.



JNZ -

Thanks for the note. The address of Rob and Anne Collins is:

Tiakeni Textiles Co-op

Box 93

Elim Hospital

0960

Tel. (01552) 703 or 701

Rob gives a most accurate account on the 'phone of how actually to get there. They're lekker people, and the whole project(s) should be a lot a fun as well as most worthwhile. They also have room in the huge farmhouse for about four or six keen workers to stay on the spot, which is on a mountain looking out through pomegranate trees across miles of highveld in one direction and the Soutpansberg in the other...

*Mark. OK (11/1)*

*Sam - will you find it further?*

So, early in March, '82, Greg Carden, casually carrying a thin sheaf of papers in one hand, came into my office.

I was irate: Central Television Service (CTVS), the place where our students have to be trained in studio production techniques, had lost our letter booking the year's worth of studio time — the detailed list. Our secretary hadn't kept a carbon copy, so I was stuck. I didn't know any of the times and dates offhand (I'd only joined the Film & TV section of the School of Dramatic Art about a month before, so I hadn't been in on the planning of the year's work). Since I couldn't replace the original with a direct duplicate, I couldn't negotiate with CTVS from a position of strength — if they had been inefficient, so had we. Worse, when I'd arrived at the studios with a group of students the day before, we hadn't been allowed in. The Education Department — "who had booked"! — were inside there doing a teaching programme.

"Hi, Pete!" said Greg. "Are you busy?"

"Ag, it's just junk," I said. "Trivia. Nothing that can't wait, though I'd better hurry up."

Greg looked puzzled, but didn't pursue it.

"This," he said, passing me the papers across the desk, "is the stuff I promised you about Tiakeni. You know — I did mention it — the documentary in the Northern Transvaal. The third years . . ."

"Oh, yes. Right. When do we do that? In June?"

"Next quarter, I think."

We made sure by looking up the due date for the project in the course guide: Wednesday, June 16. A deadline which, that morning in early March, seemed far enough away.

Promising Greg that I'd phone Rob Collins and make all the necessary arrangements, I turned back to the letter I was drafting to CTVS. The best I'd be able to do would be to try and reconstruct exact times and dates from the cryptic jottings in my desk diary. My other priority at that moment was to develop a rigorous training schedule for the third years so that, when we reached the end of the year, we might at least have one good studio programme to show. But also, I had course work of my own to do: I had registered for a full-time Honours.

The Tiakeni documentary began to slip beneath the threshold of things demanding immediate attention. I let it go.

## The determined director and man as creator

Even behind the first step, selection of a topic, there is a motive. Someone feels there is something that needs clarification, and that if one can document aspects of it (the whole truth is a legal fiction), the work will yield something useful in comprehension, or agreement, or action.<sup>1</sup>

Erik Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film*.

As Barnouw suggests, the idea for a documentary can come to anyone: it need not originate with the director.

At this stage, in any case, I did not expect to become the director as such. As I understood it, the Tiakeni project was to be a student exercise, and my role in it would be that of project co-ordinator, on-the-spot adviser and instructor — or shadow director, if you like.

My department, on the other hand, demanded the subordination of the learning process to the making of the product. This would have meant the simulation of high-pressure professional conditions, with me as director in charge of a student team of which each member would need have been confined to a specific and pre-ordained role, from tea-boy to cameraman, for the duration of the shoot. Fragmentation of learning, it was later argued, would have been compensated by the authenticity of the parallel with conditions in the industry, and by the more efficient shaping of the product within a tighter, more centralised structure of control.

Unfortunately, the basis and extent of this misunderstanding did not emerge until too late — after the first attempt to shoot the documentary appeared to have failed. Then, during the *post mortem* discussion, John van Zyl made the position clear to me, forcefully, if not angrily:

"This must not happen again. The reason why we were so delighted when you joined the department was because we thought you would carry productions through."

Tiakeni thus became an acute test of my personal worth to the department: I was being judged in terms of my ability as a documentary TV producer, and not as a teacher. At the same time, it is noteworthy that my role was not constituted by any personal merit I may or may not have had as a documentary maker, but by the needs of my department. To that extent, therefore, it was coincidental that I became the director. Obviously, if I hadn't joined the department, someone else (Greg, perhaps?) would have had to direct the Tiakeni documentary.

A number of months later, however, when the project was 90% complete, and everyone could relax a little and even begin to laugh at all the things that had gone wrong, Dr van Zyl, again, would exclaim:

"I'm very impressed! This we could show to the Vice Chancellor, or anybody."

The point was, very simply, the product. It had taken me time to orientate myself within the department and to realise it — but then I was living the story not telling it. Then as now, the small but highly ambitious group of "film people", as they are called within the Drama Department, were eager to break away and establish an independent School of Film and Television. The obstacle all along appears to have been the intransigence of the university hierarchy, who have so far rejected the proposal at least twice, and who remain to be convinced of the very need for an autonomous film school. Meanwhile, one of the strategies most strongly endorsed by the department for building up proof of how worthwhile such a school would be, is to complete and show as many productions as possible — particularly those with positive social value, like *Tiakeni*. And that, then, comprises the first framework of determination within which any director would have to act: the demands and definitions made of him by the organisation for which he works.

To return to Barnouw's point, however, and develop one of the suggestions it contains. Materially, it makes no difference to whom the idea for a documentary first occurs, because very few people could dream of trying to produce a film on their own. What is necessary, once the idea exists, is to find some means of getting the film made. An agency to back it. A camera. Lights. Crew. In short, skills and resources. Both of these became available to *Tiakeni* through contact with the university. In fact, it would seem that on the strength of Mark Orkin's lively and affirmative letter alone, the decision was taken to go ahead and make a video documentary on *Tiakeni*. For *Tiakeni*. The repercussions of such a decision on the extent of control that a director could possibly exercise, will be examined in due course, but first let us look at the documentary as a political act.

The idea crystallises, so to speak, in a matrix of social forces. Its genesis is ideological, and it is ideologically appraised. Now, exactly to what extent the oppositional ideology implicit to Orkin's letter may have affected the decision to make the *Tiakeni* documentary, it is impossible for me to say. But it does seem absolutely unquestionable that a liberal institution like the university was a more likely agency for *Tiakeni* to approach with the idea than, say, the television service of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC-TV).

Let the SABC, since it provides this country with its standard ideological fare, be our metre-stick. Then, documentaries like the BBC's film of the funeral of Neil Aggett, or the investigative report, also by a BBC team, on the African National Congress guerilla bases in Mozambique, would constitute hardcore political opposition — TV for "terrorist" supporters — and are unlikely ever to be

broadcast 'within our borders'. In comparison, a non-broadcast videotape on a legally functioning community project like Tiakeni is pretty small beer. Softcore opposition, to make further use of a tempting metaphor. But opposition, nevertheless. In a climate of political paranoia, even the appearance of opposition can be risky. Independent TV crews — for reasons made obvious above — are suspect in themselves. Furthermore, to anyone actually in the situation, the shooting of a 'socially worthwhile' documentary on a "thriving textile-printing co-operative", owned and run by black women in an otherwise poverty-stricken region of the Northern Transvaal, seemed unquestionably committed to opposition.

This oppositional factor nearly cost us the chance of being able to reshoot the documentary after the abortive first attempt. Professor R W Charlton of the university's Television Screening Committee immediately perceived the perils at their most extreme, and was reluctant to approve the application I had made for CTVS equipment and transport. So I was hauled up on the carpet before him — an unprecedented step:

"What do you want to go all the way up there for?" he objected querulously. "And in a kombi that's got 'UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND TELEVISION SERVICE' in letters that can be read a mile away, all over its sides. What will you do if you get arrested?"

I could imagine nothing other than the peace and magnificence of the countryside, and the amiable, easygoing people. I somehow couldn't entertain this sudden anxiety about the police.

"Why?" I claimed, all round-eyed and innocent. "What can they do to me? I'm only making a movie . . ."

"Oh, they can hang you up by the thumbs," he responded mildly. "They can do all sorts of pretty things to you."

But he signed my application, eventually.

Clearly, before it had any other form at all, the Tiakeni documentary had a definite and recognisable ideological character. This is important. If we understand the documentary as essentially a form of rhetoric, we can see that the core of the Tiakeni 'argument' was already developed enough to be complete. Its tendency was set. Promote the co-op. Condemn apartheid. (For this reason, the fact that in the end we made neither of the films outlined in so accurate and even captivating a way in Mark Orkin's letter, largely didn't matter: any film we made, being pinned to the same polarities, would have tended towards the same effect.)

Good, I felt.

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If, in this video documentary, I could — even only partially — demonstrate convincingly the ability of these people (virtually on their own) to organise, establish and run effectively a small but highly successful textiles co-op as alternative to an economic system in which literally millions like themselves across South Africa are enmeshed — a system which traps the majority of the women in the poverty, disease and apathy of the rural areas, while forcing all men with any strength or initiative off the land to sell their labour in bureaucratically-specified and police-controlled urban or industrial districts are 'migrant' workers for eleven months of the year — if I could project Tiakeni as a success story, a triumph over underdevelopment, I would be satisfied. I thought. Marginalised as a television producer from the start by my refusal to work for the SABC, I might for once at least be making a programme within the mainstream of humanitarian opposition to apartheid. Only, instead of being broadcast as television, and thus "predicated on an atomised, farflung public"<sup>2</sup>, the Tiakeni documentary would exist as electronic cinema, finding its own audience among the disaffected of this country, and those concerned overseas.

Such, at least, were my hopes and intentions on the eve of my return to Tiakeni for the reshoot. It soon became obvious to me, however, that I had swallowed uncritically a pivotal point. How viable an alternative could small rural commodity-production centres like Tiakeni really be? Could they ever be constellated in sufficient numbers throughout the rural areas to overcome underdevelopment? If so, how?

Rob Collins had already explained to me his belief that co-operatives could not be established under central government control the way Mugabe, for instance, appeared to be trying to organize them in Zimbabwe. Co-operatives, said Rob, could only be developed in close consultation with the people in the area, and at their invitation. Co-ops could not be imposed. People could not be drafted into them. Co-ops could therefore never be incorporated into largescale economic planning.

Granted: the problem was complex. But then, I wanted to know, to what extent did a co-op like Tiakeni depend on extraordinary, gifted and committed people like Rob and his wife, Anne? Bright in handling finances, capable organisers, full of creative schemes and with skills to offer, prepared, too, to live in remote parts of the bush for years at a time, working their hardest, taking responsibility under discouraging conditions to alleviate some of the worst poverty that raw capitalist exploitation had inflicted on the land . . . How many co-op Schweitzers could there be?

To get Tiakeni going had taken more than four years so far. It would take at least another year, according to their own estimates, before they would be able to withdraw their support entirely from the project. Five years, then, and two truly outstanding young project organisers, and what did you get? Employment for thirty people.

What did that make Tiakeni? A "triumph over underdevelopment", or something of a unique achievement? (How was one to evaluate it, if not like this?).

Perhaps we could set up an interview, and test these issues out? Specific questions —

"Now you're talking about something different, though," Rob countered. "Investigative journalism. Not a supportive documentary like the one you're doing."

Not surprisingly, the preservation of the ideology intact was Rob's predominant concern.

Concealed behind my doubts and Rob's reply lay a conflict, a struggle for control of the film. On the surface, our interaction was always smooth and pleasant. Plausible. So, it wasn't what is called a 'personality conflict'. But then, the question arises, to what exactly did Rob owe his power in the situation? How come he could affect me as director?

As we have seen, the origins of the idea for a documentary may not be particularly important. What is important is control of the idea during the filming. Craig Gilbert,<sup>3</sup> in making the television documentary series *An American Family*, hardly ever showed up on site at all but stayed in his motel room, leaving the decisions as to what and how and when to shoot — the prerogative, normally, of the director — to his film crew: Alan Raymond, on camera and Alan's wife, Susan, on sound. The Raymonds could contact Gilbert by phone in cases of emergency. Each week, Gilbert went over the rushes with them. And later, when the filming was complete, Gilbert imparted the general shape to the editing. He has taken full credit for the series himself, however, on the strength of having "conceived and produced"<sup>4</sup> it.

In certain ways Rob's position resembled Gilbert's. He wasn't of course, an experienced television man, but he was *ad hoc* producer of this videotape, and had considerable control over the idea at the time of filming because he was the only one who could flesh it out. As one of the prime movers in getting the Tiakeni co-operative going, his knowledge — not only of all the problems, both theoretical and practical, facing the factory in its everyday running as resistance to underdevelopment, but also of the people, the workers involved — was unmatched. He had to write the script. But, unlike Gilbert, between Rob and the means to make the film stood the director.

My open preference for a critical dimension to the documentary made it impossible to reduce the conflict between us to the all-too-familiar opposition between 'creative vision' and 'technical knowhow', but constantly at Tiakeni I tended to be taken for pragmatic director, in charge of precious little except paradigmatic camera shot.

As we shall see, the schema can be read in terms of any single reference point insofar as that point enters into a triangular relationship with others. This means that the schema is not dominated by any particular point of view, which is part of its usefulness. For the purposes of this paper, however, the director must remain our central concern.

Let us examine this notion of the "director". Who is he? What is his task? Everybody, of course, knows. At some level in the popular imagination (and therefore in our own), the director is the old Hollywood heavyweight, his despotism based on the multimillion dollar budget he commands. He is that furious fat guy, chewing at his cigar, acknowledged by the whole film crew as an uncompromising bastard, his sunglasses making him glitteringly opaque to outside scrutiny but ever watchful, his crassness and bullying temper balanced only by his wizardry in the art of film. (The type is dwindling, but something like it certainly did exist, and not only in tough, rough-diamond genuises like Orson Welles, but also in more run-of-the-mill Dream Machine hacks.)

Omnipotence. But even watered down, the myth still claims that the charismatic authority of the director can sweep away all obstacles. What it cannot explain is the fact that Orson Welles, for instance, in the whole of his career, saw only two of his films — *The Trial* and *Citizen Kane* — released by the studios cut and edited exactly as he had wanted and instructed.

More formal depictions of the director's role try to define his place within the structure of control. Combes & Tiffin, in their highly influential "systems approach" to television production, develop a purely functional perspective.

"A television director is a **living system**. The camera and the monitor are **machine systems**. Living systems and machine systems can function together as **man-machine systems**. A television camera and its operator form a man-machine system. A television studio is also a man-machine system."<sup>5</sup> And so on. Emphasis in the original.

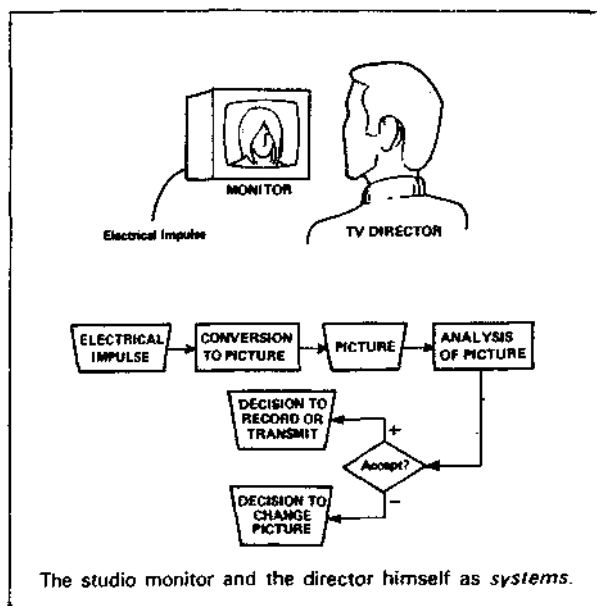
Undoubtedly, the merit of the systems approach lies in the order and clarity it can bring to organisational procedure. By reducing everything to related little boxes, it offers a neat way of structuring the mass of divergent details involved in the mounting of a television programme.

The relation to the producer/client constitutes the second framework of determination for the director. Taken together, the two frameworks — extended only to include two more reference points, the 'work' and the 'audience' — can yield a very simple general scheme or grid of production relations, with some value in its applicability to an analysis of practical situations.

But it claims to do more. It is not only a valuable logical device for use in the pencil-and-paper stages of planning, but also a way of "coping with colleagues".<sup>6</sup> In other words, the systems approach can be a persuasive perspective on production — an overall perspective, anatomising organisational procedure in the interests of increased efficiency.

The very word "system", dynamic, and apparently neutral because technical, permits the impartial equation of people and machines. With both reduced to no more than links in the chain, interconnecting parts can be lifted out, and the process of production isolated as the dominant consideration.

The following diagram<sup>7</sup> shows how the director and his studio monitor may be translated into a "system".



(Am I merely imagining it, or is there really some satisfaction evident in the emphatic inclusion of "himself" in the caption?)

It is important to perceive that Combes & Tiffin present their analysis as definitive. Rigorous. It includes only exactly what is necessary to production, and excludes as irrelevant all else.

The attention of the director shown above (whether in the rudimentary sketch or in the concise construction of little boxes) is confined to what is immediately in front of him: the picture. His capacity for decision seems to be modelled on the bifurcating logic (1-0) common to much computer programming: he can either accept the pictures, or not. If not, he must change it — again, no doubt, in terms of accepting it, or not.

Within such a system, the director, as category of control, is himself controlled. The uncompromising linear structure of the system admits of nothing but a lock-step routine. No allowances are made for criticism of the situation, in the situation. The director cannot, for instance, openly question the uses to which a production of his will be put. (Or can, of course, as long as such contentious 'private' matters do not disturb his 'professional' attitude to his work, or interfere in any other way with the planned progress of production — as long, in fact, as such obtrusive questions remain effectively outside of the system). Similarly the director cannot reflect on himself as director, or on his work as cultural action. The inevitable result is that the cut-off point in terms of responsibility and interest for both director and crew is reached as soon as a programme is 'in the can' — a piece of factory slang often heard on the studio floor. But, as Stuart Hood points out: "The fact is that television is an industry, and those who work in it are industrial workers."<sup>8</sup>

The systems approach, as this treatment suggests, is based on conditions as they actually exist — in particular, on the division of labour in a television studio. As such, it is a skilful refinement on the conceptualising of the production process.

Yet no theory of production is neutral. Implicit to any such theory is always an image of man, as well as a political theory. In the systems approach, man is unidimensional, restricted to squared-off subsections in a chart plotted to accelerate the pace of production. The living director disappears, so to speak, into his job description.

It would seem self-evident from what has gone before that any strategy towards increasing production through heightened efficiency becomes a contributory factor in work alienation, if either production or efficiency (or both) be promoted at the expense of the human being. But not only do Combes & Tiffin reinforce an efficiency ethic in isolation from its impact on the workers, they also suppress by definitive exclusion other more fundamental, difficult and meaningful socio-ethical issues, which could be formulated by the director in questions like: "Why am I making this programme? Whose interests will it serve?" Combes & Tiffin's approach thus betrays its political bias as complicity with the ideology of advanced capitalism.

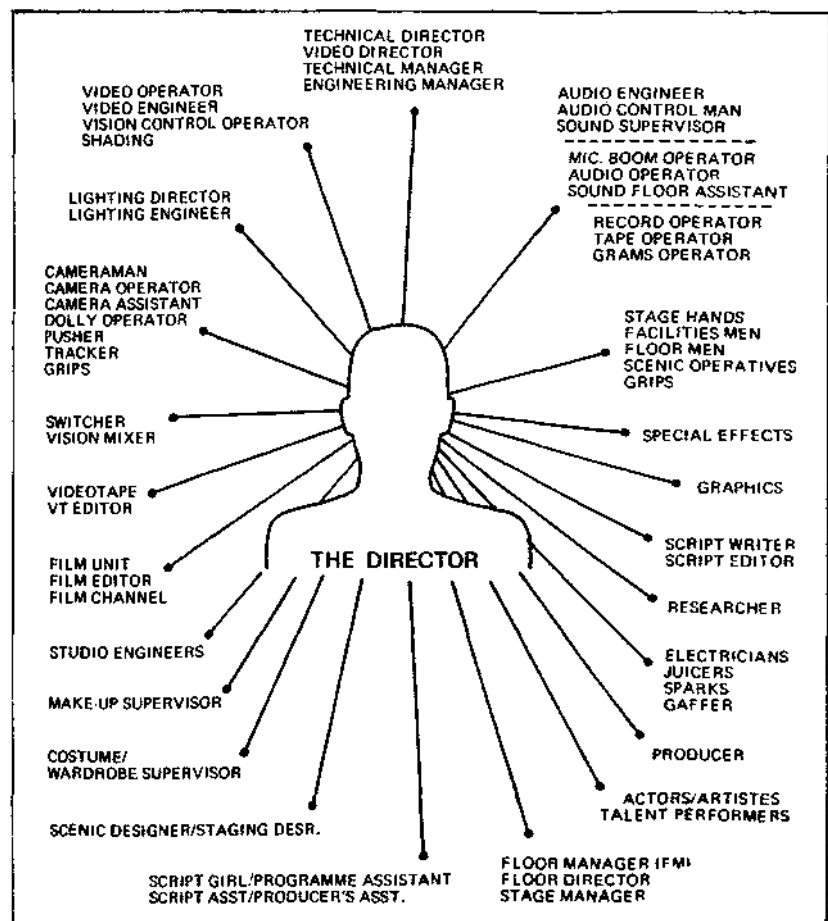
An altogether broader and more liberal view of the role of the director is put forward by Gerald Millerson in *The Technique of Television Production*, a standard authoritative work on the subject. "The TV director's job," Millerson admits frankly, "varies considerably with the organisation, and the size and type of production."<sup>9</sup> Implied here is the power of the "organisation" to delineate for

its own purposes the director's role. (Cf. The "first framework of determination", p. above.) Also — to state the obvious rather than risk its being overlooked — the "size and type" or the organisation will, no doubt, affect the "size and type of production."

But whatever the variables of production, the centrality of the director is assured, at least in studio.

"In all organisations," Millerson remarks, "the director is the key figure who unifies and guides the studio team."<sup>10</sup>

And "Production Team" is the label he gives to the diagram<sup>11</sup> below.



A picture that functions not only as a summary, or icon of work relations, I think; for it does make an impression at a connotative level as well.

Squarely modelled on his idea of the man in the role. Millerson's "key figure" is head of production, and dominant. The lines of control radiate from the director to pinpoint all other members of the team, but tend at the same time to lead straight back to him. All the lines would converge towards the centre of the head. It is almost as though the director's right to direct must spring from his intellectual superiority, which manifests itself as both the power to constellate, and the skill to co-ordinate, others.

Where Combes & Tiffin see systems, Millerson sees people, insofar as they fulfil a role. Although intended mainly for beginners, his numerous handbooks are reliable enough to be utilised as reference works in professional studios. Production, for Millerson, depends on a complex of interlocking skills, on high standards of competence, and on a detailed knowledge of what goes into the making of television — from the behaviour of the billions of brilliant electrons that light up the R G B mosaic of a colour receiver, to how to powder the head of a bald performer. "You cannot learn TV production direct from any book!"<sup>12</sup> he declares at the outset of *The Technique of Television Production*. Nothing can substitute for on-the-spot involvement in practice. Useful though it is, a purely theoretical understanding of how-to-do-it and how-it-works is, ultimately, inadequate.

Millerson's own wide experience and incomparable technical knowledge derive from many years spent in the day to day running of massive television broadcasting corporations like the BBC. He is by profession an engineer, and has latterly run courses in television production techniques at universities in America.

The TV studio as an environment of absolute control appears to be central to Millerson's theory of production. Remotes, like sporting events — but also, for our purposes, like the Tiakeni documentary — are regarded as comparatively problematic, or perhaps unwise.

"Away from the studio, the opportunities for coverage and treatment are invariably limited," Millerson notes. "The considerable areas and distances often involved at remotes, the limitations of facilities, and the environmental problems, all influence production potentials. Lightweight cameras provide mobility, but various inherent problems (local acoustics, extraneous noise, weather, light variations, continuity, etc.) must affect treatment."<sup>13</sup>

In short, quality suffers.

Condensed as it is, this laconic listing of possible difficulties mirrors precisely what went wrong at Tiakeni — both times! It would seem, therefore, that Millerson is virtually unchallengeable on this point.

Yet a moment's reflection is enough to make it obvious that it would be impracticable as well as undesirable to attempt on that account to confine production to the studio. Precisely because it is a system of total control, the television studio is sealed off from the world. It can only ingest small bits of the world at a time — so, whether it contains an armchair, or a laboratory complete with scientist, or even a huge *papier mâché* Dunsinane Hill like the one SABC-TV constructed for their *Macbeth* a few years ago, the studio cannot compete in range with a "remote" camera free to roam the world. Not only must the risk be taken with remotes but, against Millerson, it could well be argued that the studio, although it is a satisfactorily controlled space, is at least equally fundamentally "limited", in that it is contrived, sterile, artificial, etc., and that this must surely "influence production potentials" as well.

If television at the beginning of its history was bound to the studio, conditions today make decentralisation seem inevitable. Video technology — itself only part of that rapidly developing field of contemporary science, electronics — has multiplied hardware options to the point where the film maker can choose from a vast array of sophisticated and (comparatively) inexpensive equipment, most of it handy and easy to operate, and the best in no way inferior to the advanced machinery that stocks up broadcast TV studios.

The American authority, Herbert Zettl, recognises the current situation as transitional. Equipment, he reminds us, is the means to production, not its criterion.

"You should realise that the studio should not become an involuntary prison for production, simply because it is available," Zettl points out. "The highly mobile cameras and recording facilities make it less and less the only, or even the major place for production. Why bring the City Hall into the studio, when you can go to the City Hall? Nevertheless, the studio does, and will for some time to come, represent an essential production environment for many types of production."<sup>14</sup>

Zettl establishes the need for flexibility of approach, but this does not fully resolve the core-issue of "technical quality".

It is impossible to dismiss "technical quality" by reducing it to a matter of mechanics, because it depends on more than the comparative potential of equipment: the skill of the operator needs to be taken into account as well. If the operator, an audio control man, say, 'knows his job', i.e. is technically proficient, he is regarded as a 'professional' — a prime value in television.

Millerson's technicist approach tends to reinforce this value, without being committed to explaining it. Necessary as a certain level of technical competence undoubtedly is to the making of television, there remain so many other elements — programme content, to name one in particular — which are at least equally



important, that the singling out of technical expertise as the main measure of one's worth and ability can be seen to be problematic, an extraordinary specialisation, rather than simple common sense. After all, what stops an experienced worker from contributing in other ways as well?

The basis for an answer must be sought in the conditions of production. Stuart Hood (whose own experience in broadcast TV is, incidentally, quite as wide as Millerson's) describes the work situation in the light of his paradigm of television as an industry. One of the consequences of industrialisation, "which treats people as 'bodies' to be fitted on to a work roster", Hood explains,

"is that they are not involved in the planning of their work and have as little real influence on the end product as they would have on an assembly line. Film crews, for instance, will find themselves scheduled to shoot material for a programme about which they know little and about which they have not been consulted. The result is that they often have scant interest in what they produce. They will turn up on the right day at the right time and carry out their work 'professionally' — which means that they will bring to bear on the task in hand a number of known and tried skills that will produce predictable results. The exposure time will be correct and the picture sharp; the subject will be shot in such a way that the pictures can be edited together into a coherent narrative; the sound will be clear and capable of being easily synchronised with the pictures. They may then move on, on the same day, to another assignment for a different programme about which they are also ill-informed but which they will shoot with the same professional skill. Apart from checking on the technical quality of their work, the team will show little interest in how their pictures are used and have no say in that use. The result is a state of alienation — a situation in which the worker is divorced from the products of his or her own skills. They are, as Marx said, 'related to the product of their labour as to an alien object'. This state of alienation explains the cynicism with which technical crews discuss their assignments or comment on the actual progress of the shooting. Their sharp and often well-directed comments on the behaviour and ideas of the 'creative' members of the production team, or on the subjects being filmed or videotaped, are their weapons against a feeling that they are not properly valued as human beings with special skills. They are placed in this alienated position because it would, in management terms, be uneconomical for a film crew to be involved in the discussion of programme ideas of how the programme should be shot. Time spent in this way would, from management's point of view, be 'wasted' time — time in which the crew might have been producing more material, shooting more film, and so justifying the cost of their wages."<sup>15</sup>

Millerson's accurate but static picture of the production team (p. 10 above) cannot, in comparison with this passage, communicate the fullness of the actual situation: the prime concern of his picture is to fix the roles of crew and director

in terms of their central work relationship. But is role-categorisation a purely formal and objective way of understanding the relations of production? The Marxist, Cliff Slaughter, himself a lecturer in sociology, has drawn attention to the doubts surrounding the scientific status of the term "role".

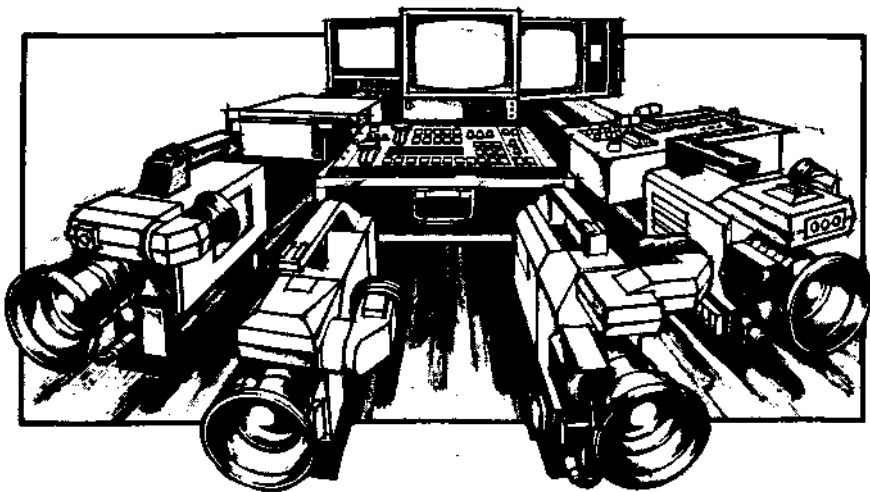
"Marxists have suggested that sociology's basic concept of 'role', far from being 'value-free', is an ideological reflection of and apologia for the division of labour in capitalist society, and not a scientific notion for grasping that society."<sup>16</sup>

As we have seen, the rigidity of structure of the production team in broadcast television, enshrining as it does the institutional split between "technical" and "creative", is not in some way due to properties inherent in the technology, but is imposed on the situation by industrial rationalisation of the work process. Whenever Millerson passes from a description of the functioning of the TV studio to prescription — to the stated or tacit implication that this is the way people should function, for instance — he is moving from "reflection" to "apologia".

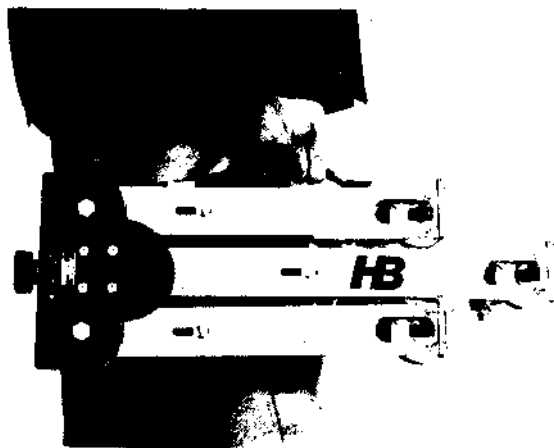
Yet an ideological critique of Millerson's work in no way diminishes the formidable strength of his major contribution, the solid core of technically based organisational and practical instruction. As long as television production remains a complex and laborious process — with the product appearing, like the cap of gold that topped King Khufu's pyramid, at the very end — there must undoubtedly be a place for detailed, methodical and exhaustive studio manuals to supplement with theory of practice the skills acquired during experience of production in the studio. It is possible, therefore, to study *The Technique of Television Production* for the gains in technical theory and for the innumerable tips on organisation, while discounting the general ideology — "technical quality" as the sole or highest value, for instance.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that the ready availability of good quality, relatively inexpensive, and increasingly simple-to-operate video equipment materially undermines Millerson's stand. Ease of handling, reliability and sophisticated results inevitably relegate technical questions to the simplest, and, for the user, least sustainedly urgent level. But the really radical consequence of the rapid advance in portable video technology lies in its potential to liberate the TV maker from the studio — as institution, not as pure and controlled working space.

"Considering the monolithic nature of network TV," writes J Hoberman in a special supplement on video, "the invention of the Sony Portapak was a more epochal event than, say, the development of the 16mm camera. Television before half-inch tape was comparable to the situation in Poland after the December coup: radio, but no telephone. (Or, to be somewhat *recherché*: TV before video = *langue* without *parole*.)"<sup>17</sup>

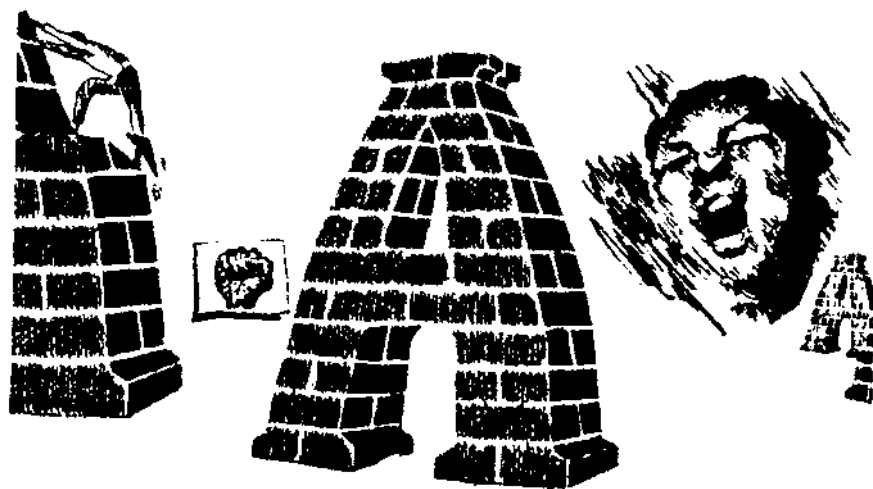


By the rapid advance in  
portable video technology  
the TV maker has been  
liberated from the studio.



Broadcast TV production is authoritarian, depending on an elaborate system of control, epitomised by the role of the director. Video is democratic, if not anarchistic. This is the source of its energy and excitement. It is quite possible, today, for the video maker to step outside of the studio as a one-man band — ENG camera on one shoulder, headphones clamped on and monitoring the sound from the camera's built-in mike, VCR slung over the other shoulder — or, as a communications knight in full armour. Corresponding to the world of new opportunities now facing the video maker, comes a change in his problematic. Where previously questions of **how** tended to predominate, questions of **what** to shoot and **why** begin to take precedence.

This is analogous to a shift that appears already to have taken place in the field of still photography, where the priority once accorded to technical questions has begun to wane — for similar reasons, e.g. a far greater facility of operation where top class equipment, like excellent cameras, is concerned — giving rise to what Frank Webster calls the "new photography". According to Webster:



"The old photography knew how to get pictures, but it rarely asked why particular pictures were produced. In so doing it omitted a whole series of questions taken as axiomatic by the new photography. Examples of such questions? — Why is such and such an image significant? How does it manage to signify? Why does a society require certain images at particular times? Why do genres arise in photography? How and why do certain images become judged aesthetically worthy? Why do photographers produce pictures which, above and beyond their technical wizardry or creative acumen, say something specific about the social world? What are the political meanings of photography? Who controls the machinery of photography in contemporary society? With the increasing accessibility of cameras for the man or woman in the street what are the implications for photographic communication of oligopolistic trends in the industry? Who employs photographers? Have employment trends changed? If so, what are the effects of these changes? . . .

"Put summarily, the new photography insists that we recognise image creation as an attempt at communication. It contends that photography and photographers should realise that their central endeavour is to communicate through photography. Necessarily, this requires coming to terms with the social in photography. In turn it insists that the photographer recognises his role in society. It is no longer adequate, says the new photography, to learn a list of photographic techniques. What is important is the intention of photography to project **meaning**. There is consequently a question of interpretation, communication and social analysis."<sup>18</sup>

Video, perhaps, is the new television.

In South Africa, one way in which video could function with impact might be as a form of guerrilla TV, "VIDEO BLACK AND RED", to sloganise it. Video which might create in the masses of the people tiny counter-currents to the one-way tide beamed at them daily from Auckland Park. Such an attempt could gain direction by means of a conscious self-definition in reaction to the dominant form of television. Instead of smooth-flowing, self-contained programmes, seamlessly merging with one another from the beginning of transmission to the end, the idea would be to make 'triggers': shortburst, concentrated sequences, each intended to stimulate thinking and discussion in a particular area. Clearly, unlike the BBC scoop of the funeral of Neil Aggett, this is not simply another powerful and original TV programme, but a totally different usage, in which radical aims could be furthered by radical form. If video were to be about video, for instance — say, the process of film-making were to be deconstructed as part of the film's own subject matter — then at the same time as raising pressing issues like the housing shortage, 'Bantu' education, influx control, etc., there is the possibility that the medium itself could begin to

## VIDEO BLACK AND RED



Video to create in the masses of the people tiny counter-currents to the one-way tide beamed at them daily from Auckland Park.

be demystified. At its best, the trigger movie would be a critical practice seeking to provide a few splinters with which the prevalent ideology of a State apparatus like SABC-TV might be punctured. For distribution, "marginal spaces", to use Allan Sekula's term, would have to be sought — "spaces where issues can be discussed collectively"<sup>19</sup> — church halls in the townships, school classrooms, even people's kitchens or livingrooms, for that matter.

The aim of any trigger series would be to problematise rather than to persuade. Each film would have to be condensed and controlled and clear, providing sharp focus on the particular subject as related to the main issue. A helpful strategy is offered by dialectic. Take the issue of housing again. A typical trigger movie might contain an interview with a white radical, intercut with an interview with a black conservative, using the same questions, camera angles and distances, lighting and surrounds in each, and adding no extra commentary. Impartiality would not be part of the attempt, however, but bareness, direct truthfulness would: the camera as instrument of political scrutiny, when what is at stake in reality affects the daily lives of all those watching. In the film, the problems are raised but never resolved, of course. Instead, each film is left full of contradictions and potential. If this is sufficient, discussion will ensue. Ultimately, perhaps, and at its most developed, trigger video might become a force in the creation of critical social discourse among the people.

If television can be described as what everybody discusses the next day, trigger video is what is discussed on the spot. Not that the only valid questions relate directly to the issue on which the particular series is based. Other questions, many of them related to triggers as communication practice, are equally fundamental and significant. For example:- Is class the only paradigm necessary to the production of trigger films for the townships, or should ethnicity also play a part? In general, how important is cultural conditioning to the relationship between latent and manifest meaning in a trigger? Are the strategies taken from dialectical theory — the trigger as defined in rigorous antithesis to continuous flow and the glossy commodity; the trigger as a rough, brief, electronic recording of conflicting aspects of a single problem, whether in relatively simple syntagmatic collision, or in a more highly complex structure where "sound and image, or sound, image, and text, can be worked over and against each other, leading to the possibility of negation and metacommentary",<sup>20</sup> the trigger as presenting thematically coherent but suggestively contradictory material, and then stopping short of drawing any conclusions, thus creating a space for the active contribution of the viewers; the trigger as being placed in the physical control of the viewers, who can stop and repeat a part or the whole at will, for instance, and to whose choice it is left to watch the series either in a straight (non-narrative) row, or one at a time — are such dialectical strategies in fact

effective in comparison with the powers of broadcast TV, whose hegemony they are intended to subvert? Exactly what constitutes a 'manipulation' of the medium, and how could triggers avoid and/or expose it? If the film makers were to accept the pragmatic Marxist-Leninist doctrine that the only good is that which furthers the cause of the working class, what would be the implications for trigger film theory — one of the axioms of which must be that it is always possible to transcend and reflect on ideology? By what criteria do trigger film makers include certain material and exclude other — and would it be possible for the viewers to be drawn into the decision-making process? In what way would the undoubted illegality of a trigger film project in South Africa affect the different activities of planning, shooting and distribution of the videotapes? And where would the funds come from to finance so costly an undertaking?



== ACT NO. 42 1986 ==  
SECTION 19



At present, triggers are a hypothetical option — though by no means a remote or idle one. Video opens the possibility of such radically democratic uses. The television we know closes it.

To return to an earlier point: the relationship between 'technique' and 'creativity'. For the technician, it is very simple. Technique is a skill, and can be acquired by practice. Creativity, on the other hand, is purely innate, a 'gift'. It follows that many more people can be trained in technique than can ever hope to be creatively productive. For every director, there will be an army of technicians. The TV studio is the director's prime sphere of command, a space-age construct of sophisticated technology manned by willing workers, and all of it geared towards the realisation of his vision.

It is a pretty myth, but not matched by actually existing conditions in the industry.

As we have seen, 'technique' and 'creativity' are not separated or opposed by some kind of schism in the heart of things, but by an inflexible structure of production relations derived from the capitalist ordering of the economy. In order to maintain the dominance of this particular power structure over the majority of the workers, it is necessary to exclude them from creative decision making, and this is accomplished by the device of turning them into 'technical' staff, and defining their contribution as necessarily limited. At the same time, it is impossible totally to reduce the making of television to an industrial mass production process, because of the part played by creativity in every programme. Even Stuart Hood, who maintains an industrial model throughout, admits of an essential difference between work in factory production and work in television: television production always includes, as part of its raw material, human creativity. The hierarchical production system places the burden for most creative decisions squarely on the shoulders of the director. In other words, not only must the director — like the factory foreman — be an expert at efficiently knocking his assembly together, but also — unlike the factory foreman — he must contribute actively, drawing on his own resources of ingenuity, sensitivity and imagination for every product.

There is an ambivalence in the TV director's role, then. Insofar as he is an efficient organiser, he is management's man in the controlroom. Insofar as he is an *auteur*, he is himself, relying on his own ideas. This system of television production is not by any means sympathetic to the *auteur*, however. Millerson, in his usual lucid and down-to-earth manner, analyses the situation in terms of its immediate demands, under the heading, "Production Pressures".

"Pre-occupation with the organisation and co-ordination of production mechanics, leaves most directors little time to meditate on the medium's aesthetics. Rehearsal time is limited. The camera and sound crews are meeting the director's brainchild for the first time and need to be guided in his interpretation."<sup>21</sup>

Here, Millerson's unquestionably solid knowledge of the everyday functioning of the TV studio merges almost unnoticeably into a rationalisation of existing procedures. It is not because the organisation behind a production is a complicated and cumbersome affair that time is limited, for instance, but because time has a significantly quantifiable value within the system in the first place — "Time is money", as Hood would point out — and is as such itself strictly limited, that the pressure is on.

Although Millerson's general impartiality of tone is to some extent compromised by the weight of patronising irony contained in turns of phrase like "meditate on the medium's aesthetics" and the "director's brainchild", the cumulative effect of his stance of plain statement is to make undeniable the fact that **that's the way things are. No sense in looking any further.** Thus, the parameters of the technicist approach are never wide enough to include as an object of analysis the socio-economic structure upon which television is ideologically predicated, but tend to remain complacently strong by virtue of their relevance to the *status quo*. Again: the singular concentration on technique precludes an understanding of television as a force in cultural production.

Yet, as the dualistic split in the director's role indicates, this system of television production is contradictory, and wasteful of human potential. At the same time as depending on creativity for its existence, it exploits people and their ideas for its own ends, thus simultaneously offering and betraying the conditions necessary to the overcoming of alienation through productive self-fulfilment. Television becomes, in the words of Don Taylor, "a living image of the values of a society that uses the products of the creative imagination to sell soap."<sup>22</sup>

Taylor, the outstanding BBC director who directed the works of one of television's first major playwrights, David Mercer, explains the situation in terms of concrete experience of the system from within. He has, however, no illusions about television's potential for developing a significant form of drama. Like any other programme, a TV play is nothing but a commodity — and MORE is the inexorable law of consumerism.

"The demand for material creates . . . a situation in which there is never enough time. Television plays are rushed on to the air too quickly, without sufficient time for thought. Television directors are lucky if they ever get the opportunity to lie fallow, to recoup their creative energies. Too often they must put a play on the air in the most obvious way because there is no time for second thoughts. They fall back on techniques they used last month, or last year. Multiply this by twenty plays in three years, and staleness is not surprising. Television, for reasons beyond the control of its creators, is organised like an industry, not as a creative enterprise."<sup>23</sup>

Once more, therefore, and inescapably, it is the first framework of determination, the role as conceived and imposed by the organisation, which exerts the most implacable control. Talented directors like Don Taylor emerge only despite the system, and rarely. Great plays like Mercer's, profoundly political as well as personal in impact and implication, are, perhaps, even more rarely produced by broadcasting complexes like the BBC, and then only in times of more general political relaxation, like the economic boom period of the early sixties.

The point is not to reify creativity, but to appreciate that it could operate at many more levels than the one allowed by the myth projecting the director as sole creative daemon, and to understand clearly that the industrial structure standing against television's becoming a fully 'creative enterprise' has its basis in a repressive social order, an order which needs to use TV as a pacifier, a means of mass domestication rather than of human liberation. Hood, again, does not question the creativity of TV's programme makers, but he is sceptical of their originality: most production practices, he observes are acquired rather than inspired. But since the learning process (like the production process) would appear to be purely formal, most of the men and women involved in the making of TV programmes are unaware of an ideological dimension to their activity, and would defend most of their everyday choices and practice as "natural" to the medium, or simply "common sense".

Hood's point is borne out by my own experience at CTVS, where for a time I was trained in TV production by an ex-BBC man, Timothy Dodd. Dodd was a great believer in "common sense" as a guide to "what you can do in TV — and what you can't", but nowhere was he stricter and more inflexible than in his groundrules for camerawork and editing. "Never draw attention to camera movement". "Keep the whole process unobtrusive: centre on the subject and follow the action." "Cut on the action." "Avoid jump cuts." And so on. All of it stock TV practice, but "natural" or logical only in terms of specific aims, like promoting the illusion of direct access to the pro-filmic event, so that what is chosen to appear on the TV screen seems effortlessly to replicate, or even to extend, our everyday ways of seeing and engaging with the world. The broad but unspoken guiding assumption would seem to be that watching TV is a way of 'seeing it for real'.

'Common sense' is not pure nonsense, of course. But neither is it a rock-solid fund of folk wisdom derived from long and honest contact with everyday reality. It is, rather, the voice of everyday conventionality, consisting of simple idiomatic summaries of the safest basic relationship to the order of the day. "Common sense" is, thus, as Gramsci noted, the "sense of the ruling class."<sup>24</sup> Inherently conservative, it never doubts the good sense of relying on the dominant structure as ultimately unchangeable.

My 'hands on' experience at CTVS amounted, therefore, to no more than an initiation into the dominant conventions of television. Conventions, moreover, which were never presented as such. The crucial distinction between realism and reality, for example, fall beyond the bounds of common sense and could not be articulated or even simply indicated.

A fragment of Robert Tyrrell's advice to the reader in Chapter 5 of *The Work of the Television Journalist*, "The Director as Movie Maker", might (inadvertently, perhaps) prove illuminating here. At one point, Tyrrell finds it necessary to remark:

"This does not mean that a sequence involving cuts must run exactly the length of time it would take for events to occur in real life. The illusion is what counts. If we were to bridge the interval between departure and arrival with, say, ten seconds of cut-in shots of various aspects of the journey (from Westminster to St. Paul's), the viewer would probably not be conscious of any unreality, provided each shot seemed to follow from the previous shot."<sup>25</sup>

From the start, then, and in every way from personal instruction on the studio floor to general reading, the learner director in TV tends to be encouraged to internalise production practices which unreflectively uphold and develop a naturalistic ideology — an ideology which, by validating appearances, not only handsomely reflects but also rarely disrupts the self-image of the *status quo*. "The illusion is what counts."

Realistic illusionism, the comfortable convention of mainstream television, is afforded a striking parallel in the principles and practice of Sergei Eisenstein's "deadly enemy", the Moscow Arts Theatre.

"It is the exact antithesis of all I am trying to do," cried Eisenstein. "They string their emotions together to give a continuous illusion of reality. I take photographs of reality and then cut them up so as to produce emotions. . . . I am not a realist, I am a materialist. I believe that things, that matter gives us the basis of our sensations. I get away from realism by going to reality."<sup>26</sup>

It may be objected that there is so vast a discrepancy between an inimitable revolutionary genius like Eisenstein and all the innumerable, more or less anonymous, run-of-the-mill TV directors in the industry, that the implied comparison is impossible. The blunt reply would be that it is exactly on the structural circumstances behind such a discrepancy that a major part of the argument here is based. The conditions that generally rule TV production have been explored through a key figure: the director. And, as the preceding pages ( - ) have attempted to show, the heavy stones of the mill themselves grind everything down to the required domestic consistency.

In short, the TV director is **not** simply the electronic media counterpart to the celebrated caricature of the film world's potentate — 'that furious fat guy, chewing at his cigar' — the Hollywood director, with whom this discussion began. If Hollywood demanded of its directors the creation of peaks — sensational smash hits that would get people to queue round the block at all hours in any weather for a ticket — then TV, by contrast, wants endless plains, long hours of smoothly linked programming, entertaining enough to while away the time of entropy in the middle class living room.

Or, to employ Hood's model again: the Hollywood director would be a high-powered executive, and the TV director, a competent foreman on the factory floor.

Also: despite the technico-practical rationale built into the standard textbooks on television making, it is quite clear that the relations of production in television do not spring from the imperatives of technical efficiency alone, but also from more tangled and intransigent roots in class society itself. It is under the pressure of commodity promotion generated by consumer capitalism, too, that a reversal of standards takes place in TV aesthetics. The greatest ingenuity and brilliance become concentrated on the truly trivial: TV ads. On the most effective and original ways, that is, of making the market product seem compulsively attractive through an enhancement of exchange value together with a reduction in attention to actual use value<sup>27</sup> — while potentially more significant developments, like TV drama, are squeezed into a harried corner where what matters is to meet the deadline with something that will fill the looming time-slot to the satisfaction of the corporation, and then get on to the next production. Without the opportunity to mature and unfold, interpretative creative statement is rendered superficial — a superficiality that goes unregarded during production because of the worker's internalisation of purely formal criteria like "high professional competence" as the prime, if not the only, consideration necessary to TV making. A superficiality, again, comprised as well as rationalised by the pseudo-popular pitch of much television programming: "entertaining, a more or less accurate picture of the surface of life, and demanding almost nothing".<sup>28</sup>

It is, therefore, not an absence, not merely a lack of individual talent, which determines the character of much broadcast television, but the presence, instead, of what Don Taylor, in his analysis of the poverty of TV drama, has called "these restrictive conditions".<sup>29</sup> Clearly, between director as creator and a mode of production like a factory assembly line, a contradiction immediately comes into being — but a contradiction functionally so indivisible from established studio practice that common sense would regard it as no indictment of the system, but rather as a problem in some way peculiar to the director himself, were it openly to crop up.

Whether open or suppressed, however, the contradiction remains in force. The working director will encounter it, and will have to negotiate a position *vis à vis* the system, accordingly. Attitudes must crystallise. Of a full and complex range of possible reactions, the following four can perhaps be cited as cardinal:

**1. Denial of the validity of the contradiction.** If amply developed, this stance becomes an affirmation of the system, highlighting the achievements it claims for TV. In other words: total capitulation to the system for what are believed to be its unique advantages.

**2. Admission that the system will have unavoidable constraints and difficulties, without conceding the centrality of the contradiction.** This attitude, with all the ambiguity and compromise involved in it, is consistent with a faith in the effectiveness of individual morality, e.g. integrity, qualitatively to influence the system's functioning. Needless to add, it generally assumes the fundamental neutrality of the system, as well as the individual's ability to assert himself over a role, the limitations of which constitute his value to the system.

**3. Refusal to submit to the contradiction.** Rejection of the working conditions in broadcast TV on the grounds of the impossibility of acting within the system on any terms other than its own. This leads to employment outside of the system — with a private company making TV ads, for instance — where conditions may obviously be no better, except for the decisive factor (apart from more money) that more scope would appear to be offered for individual creative initiative. Of course, to be an independent film maker contracted to TV — a Frederick Wiseman or a Michael Rubbo — might well be the ideal here.

**4. A grasp of the contradiction as but a specific manifestation of the coercive structure of the wider socio-political system.** The resolve to work, therefore, not simply outside of the TV studio system, but actively against the wider system, in order to contribute in some measure to revolutionary social change. In this case, the aim and the problem are one and the same, and could be summed up in the imperative: "TV for liberation — not domestication."

The cardinal points above establish an essentially conceptual compass, i.e. they are not necessarily identical with any actual position. My own present position, for instance, would fall between 3 and 4 — say 40% of 3 and 60% of 4. Furthermore, such positions are not always final.

To those convinced that option 1, the conformist option, irrefutably offers the only opportunities worthy of serious consideration, very little can be said in this report. Except, perhaps, for a remark made by Bertolt Brecht on the "muddled thinking" that overtakes the producers of capitalist culture when they attempt to

defend their own positions:

"For by imagining that they have got hold of an apparatus which has in fact got hold of them they are supporting an apparatus over which they have no control."<sup>30</sup>

To the remainder, however, a certain amount of critical reflection on the role of the director, together with an account of the making of a video documentary like the one on Tiakeni, may be of some value.

It would be as well at this point to recall that the contradiction within TV production affects all the workers, and not the director alone, and to repeat an earlier formulation of the problem: "At the same time as depending on creativity for its existence, (this system of TV production) exploits people and their ideas for its own ends, thus simultaneously offering and betraying the conditions necessary to overcoming alienation through creative self-fulfilment."<sup>31</sup> In fact, the director, apparently assured of creative autonomy within the system, would seem to be — and is — the last person to whom the contradiction could apply. Yet it does: hence, the importance of iconoclasm with regard to the image of his omnipotence.

It is at last possible, therefore to attempt a reply to the initial question — 'Who is the director? What is his task?' — without relying on the structure of the industry to provide the definitive parameters.

For the role of the director is, as we have seen, not necessary but contingent. Contingent upon a hierarchical ordering of production. Contingent, infra-structurally, upon the division of labour into an elaborate system of specialisations, which interlock but do not overlap. In practice, the director is situated exactly at the point of impact between front-of-camera action and behind-camera control — a siting which constitutes the basis of directorial responsibility for everything selected for (or excluded from) the filming. In itself, the recurrent need for decisiveness does not, of course, justify the usual argument in favour of the centralisation of power in one man: it simply demonstrates that for filming to be undertaken at all, certain facilitative decisions have constantly to be made. Clearly, such decisions could be made by a group — the front-of-camera people, for instance, together with the film crew — rather than by one person alone.

Thus, there need be no "director" at all, but directing could still be carried out. In movie production as a democratic activity, the critical contribution of every member of the film team could be broadened considerably, but the authoritarian imposition of a single voice would be suspended.

Apart from political sentiment, however, when would democratic production be more effective than other structures? (The kind is dead. Long live the king. "What is the director if he is not a "director"?)

Now video, as we have already seen, can claim two powerful operational potentials as a result of its liberation from containment and control in the TV studio. One is democratic, the other anarchistic. The anarchistic option, which dumps the camera straight into the hands of the people, was subject to extensive trials in the seventies. Politically, it was at least optimistic. "It places immense power in the hands of the people, any people, who happen to be pressing the buttons,"<sup>32</sup> an enthusiast claimed. And the results were authentic, in that they were certainly produced by the people handling the equipment on their own. But the greatest result anticipated — the proliferation of an incontestable People's Vision, uncontaminated by the dominant cinematic conventions, as all experienced video makers were debarred from the process from the start — this has not appeared.

Video, it seems, is not only a means of self-expression. It is also, and perhaps primarily, a medium of communication. Give a man a pencil and paper when he has never before experienced the use of such things, and what you can legitimately expect of him is experimentation — his own marks, scribbles, drawings — but you can hardly expect him to write.

Edmund Carpenter, who spent a long time putting cameras into other people's hands, no longer believes in the anarchistic method. The results are too weak. In a report on work with villagers in New Guinea, Carpenter notes the following: "Western audiences delight in stories about natives who use modern media in curious ways, their errors being both humorous and profound, suddenly illuminating the very nature of the media themselves. Even when these stories are true, I think their importance is exaggerated. Surely, the significant point is that media permit little experimentation and only a person of enormous power and sophistication is capable of escaping their binding power. A very naïve person may stumble across some interesting technique, though I think such stories are more frequently told than documented. The trend is otherwise."<sup>33</sup>

If the intention was really merely to extend Western critical insights into the "very nature of the media", if all that was at stake was the absorption into a clamorous and omnivorous film culture of "naïve" ways of seeing, then the New Guinea villagers and others like them have lost nothing by disappointing the initiators of such projects. In fact, they have probably had a lucky escape. The loan of the camera here seems to add up to no more than the first step towards exploiting the people's ultimate inner resources, the genius of their pre-industrial perception of the world.



But if, as I have already suggested, the failure of anarchistic practice in video production is more intimately wrapped up in the dynamics of anarchism itself, which shatters and diffuses into too many random and minor and incoherent activities ever to combine as a solid force in the hands of the millions for whose sake revolutionary transformation is necessary — the people of the “culture of silence”, the vast masses, like rural black South Africans, so crushed and demoralised by oppression that they stagnate in apathy — then this failure must be acknowledged, but the goal can be reaffirmed, while new routes to it are sought. Democratic production, the other strong possibility for video, now promises to come into its own.

Not video as a haphazard exploration of the medium, but video as a conscious contributions to the people's struggle against oppression. Not video in isolation from other similar social projects, but video linked into already tried and tested ongoing programmes — like literacy training, where the aim is not simply to get people to read and write but to get them to perceive, interpret, criticise and finally transform their world. Under conditions of advanced capitalism, the value of viewer-based television studies in terms of exactly such aims has been clarified by Len Masterman in *Teaching about Television*, a useful critical and practical manual for the “television teacher” in the British schools system. But in South Africa, where the level of TV saturation among the masses is relatively minimal, radical forms of video like “triggers” are at least potentially important, too. As the politically schizoid condition of apartheid slowly intensifies into civil war, the possibility of revolution becomes more real. The radical video maker can afford to be bold, and to take clear risks (unlike my own more or less imaginary ones at Tiakeni). It is important, however, to acknowledge the fact that seizing control of the apparatus of State power and winning the political revolution would neither correspond to nor necessarily precipitate the cultural revolution. And in South Africa, where authoritarian structures are as indispensable to residual tribalism as to white *baasskap* (white supremacy) in its heyday, anti-democratic opposition is likely to persist well into the post-revolutionary era. The revolution would be a watershed, certainly — on either side of which the video maker as radical democrat would have to work.

In spaces where the conventional structures have broken down to the extent that their continued legitimacy is in question, to begin with, perhaps: among squatters, rebellious students in the townships, rural women . . .

Here and now, therefore, democratic video making would qualify, in Paulo Freire's words, as “cultural action for freedom”<sup>34</sup>, “Underdevelopment” (outmoded now as a term, but basically accurate, though negative) is identified by the Freirean commentator, João da Veiga Coutinho, as a “state of prostration of the spirit”.<sup>35</sup> Literacy programmes, successfully carried out by Freire and many others inspired by his methods in different parts of the Third

World — in Brazil, Chile and Guinea-Bissau, to name a few — have shown, repeatedly and convincingly, that the first steps towards overcoming “under-development” are taken when the people themselves manage to dispel the internalised passivity of the oppressed, and begin to assert their selfworth and potency as human beings. This comes about through group action in thinking, discussing and making decisions in terms of real projects — like learning to read and write. Video could be another such project. But only if the video maker could drop all pretensions to dominance (like ‘project initiator’, ‘director’ or whatever) and maintain his identity as experienced collaborator, at the same time as working on an equal footing with all others in the group. Democratic video production, I would argue, therefore, and no other kind, is capable of becoming a factor in such human development.

It may be objected, though, that it is quite possible — in fact, it has frequently been ventured upon by TV crews from overseas — to enter a squatter camp, a burning township, a rural slum, and work professionally, getting the people to assert themselves and speak out (the BBC-TV interview with Tsietsi Mashinini in Soweto during the uprising of '76 comes to mind), as well as ensuring that a broadcast-quality documentary with political impact is shot.

What's wrong with that?

Nothing, of course. Unless it tacitly implies that the democratic method would not issue in a “broadcast-quality documentary with political impact”, when it could. While the decision whether or not to aim at a “broadcast-quality” production would have to rest entirely with the people, it is certain that, given good equipment and a video maker with sufficient expertise, it would not be impossible.

Insofar as there is more to video production than simply “pressing the buttons” (plenty more), the contribution of the video maker himself cannot be overlooked. Only he begins with a command of cinematic language, and so he will inevitably be regarded by the people as the point of reference and support for the programme(s) being made. In democratic video, the camera cannot be handed over to just anyone, but is likely to be left largely (though not exclusively or at all necessarily) in the hands of the video maker. At the same time, significantly enough, that part of the anarchist's manifesto which claims to place ‘immense power in the hands of the people’ might at last be fulfilled — but through the possibility of making video statements, not through expecting great things from a crude relinquishing of the means of production to unskilled people.

Dialectically, therefore, democratic video making is a logical step beyond its predecessors — authoritarian TV production and its contradiction, anarchistic practice.

Then again, while the professional television producer might see the value of a documentary on, say, Stinkwater, in terms of the kind of struggle which needs to score political points, the democratic video maker recognises as deeply political the struggle of the members of an oppressed community to begin to take charge of their own lives. True to dominant opinion, too, the professional does not question the apparent superiority of broadcast TV, while the radical video maker has no alternative but to rely on the potential of cassette distribution. More than that — he sees the programme on cassette as saved from pure ephemerality and the levelling effects of continuous flow, and as restored to circulation as cinema among the people most concerned.

But the strongest objection of the democratic video maker to the imposition of mainstream television production techniques among the masses is that it perpetuates the attitudes of oppressive society — attitudes of dominance and subservience that go unquestioned, because taken for granted as normal.

Let Paulo Freire's ten "contradictions"<sup>36</sup> (originally devised to expose the active/passive polarities in the relationship between teacher and pupils) be adapted, by way of demonstration, to the relationship between the professional director and the people, then:

- 1 The director directs and the people are directed.
- 2 The director knows everything and the people know nothing.
- 3 The director thinks and the people are thought about.
- 4 The director makes the film and the people appear in it.
- 5 The director controls and the people are controlled.
- 6 The director chooses and enforces his choice, and the people comply.
- 7 The director acts, and the people have the illusion of acting through the action of the director.
- 8 The director chooses the programme content, and the people (who were not consulted) adapt to it.
- 9 The director confuses the authority of knowledge with his own professional authority, which he sets in opposition to the freedom of the people.
- 10 The director is the subject of the shooting process, while the people are mere objects.

Of course, all that is said above about the relations obtaining between the director and the (front-of-camera) people could with equal validity apply to the relations between the director and the (back-of-camera) people, the crew. For, time and again, Freire's ten points make the same telling point. (As such, the list is not exhaustive, but could be extended indefinitely with similarly insightful additions, as and when these were to crop up.) To concentrate power in a single person is to deny due control over their situation to the others.

All that is accomplished by the professional TV director who incarnates the values of centralised power by identifying the making of a programme with the exercise of his role is to divorce decision-making from everyone else involved in the production all around and in front of him, in order to promote the corporate interests of the medium under State control — and then, whether the broadcasting corporation happens to be British or American or South African makes little difference in terms of the basic methods of production. For instance, the BBC/ABC/SABC director may allow the people a say in the programme, but never a say over it.

"A central question posed by documentary film is what to do with the people."<sup>37</sup> Bill Nichols observes. ("People" here in a straightforward and ordinary, not too ideologically-weighted a sense.) In democratic video, it could be claimed that this question is reversed and becomes, instead: "What are the people to do with the film?"

Axiomatic to the ethics of democratic video making is that the relations between the film and the people be established first through dialogue between the people and the film maker, to be followed by common action, reflection, and again, and constantly, dialogue. Like the process, the product would be required to further the aim, and contribute towards developing among the oppressed the voice and the presence otherwise systematically denied them. So the product would preferably be a documentary, to provide the group and its members with the grounds for producing their own 'voice and presence' on videotape, thus literalising in the product the project's aims.

Once completed, however, a product tends to gain relative autonomy, in that it then begins to function in a different mode to that of production. Where previously the camera was the constellating equipment, the screen now is. The active production of meaning is succeeded by its reading — although in documentary, unlike purely fictional forms of cinema, apart from meaning and interpretation there will always be the hovering question of verifiability. The screen can ever offer only a *prima facie* case. If, for instance, the people on TV appear to be asserting themselves and speaking out, there is no immediate way for the viewer to check whether the effect was rigged or not. Outside information would be needed. Without it, the viewer is confined to the sealed world of the product.

Now, it may be correct to accept Bill Nichols' point that the diegetic level of the documentary must be sought in rhetorical argument, and not in reference to "reality" through a kind of positivism which claims photography equals facts.<sup>38</sup> Film, any film, is made up of countless acts of paradigmatic and syntagmatic selection and arrangement, which together add up to an interpretation, a tendency. At the same time, however, it could in no way be counted as correct to

embrace the conclusion that all arguments are equally rhetorical, or equally valid, and that they therefore depend for their ratification on no more than a correspondence with ideology. (In a similar vein, it would be self-contradictory to propose: "There is no truth only ideology!" as the basis for action, e.g. the shooting of a documentary. In order to function as such, that proposition would itself first have to be accepted as true — which is exactly what it negates. In other words, in order to be true, it would first have to be false.) Documentary, in particular, cannot be judged totally in terms of ideology without violating a key principle, its basis in non-fiction. Nichols has demonstrated that the viewer unhesitatingly accepts as true a documentary that accords with his, the viewer's, own ideology, but then again, this does not mean that the viewer will believe a documentary to be true simply because it does so. To use Aristotelian terminology: ideology is a necessary but not a sufficient factor in deciding the truth-value of a non-fictional cinematic statement. The point is not difficult to prove. Take a (hypothetical) documentary on apartheid circulating in London. One relatively minor sequence in the film involves, let us say, a crowd of ragged black children who are seen to be picking intently through the contents of an overflowing garbage can. The commentary leaves no doubt that these children are in fact forced to scavenge by a system which sacrifices them to white affluence. Then, in an interview with the *Guardian* or perhaps the *Daily Telegraph*, the movie's cameraman lets slip the information that those alley kids were not digging for food at all, but for cash. Coins had been placed among the rubbish by the film crew, and the children invited to a treasure hunt as a shortcut to illustrating dramatically the point the script had to make. The impact of such news on the film would be ruinous: its validity as a documentary would be undermined, even if not a single one of the other, major events happened to be similarly fabricated. Although the viewer's conviction that apartheid is a crime against humanity would probably go unaffected, it is unimaginable that anyone would now put up a serious defence of the film. Credibility remains crucial to the form: it is its *sine qua non*, and so cannot simply be assimilated to ideology. If the key requirement in the viewing of a feature film can be described as a suspension of disbelief, then an endorsement of actual belief can be said to be the corresponding requirement in documentary.

Not all documentaries are equally rhetorical — and some, at least, must present a demonstrable, objective truth. Think, for instance, of an instructional video on the performance of an appendectomy, to be used in the training of surgeons, and shot in the operating theatre under real, and not simulated conditions.

Purely at the level of theory, what is needed, then, is a register across the spectrum of rhetoric: from zero, the specifically verifiable documentary statement like the surgical programme already mentioned, to white heat and propaganda, when political gain is promoted at the cost of all else. In the present report, however, the pursuit of a theory of abstract rhetorical categories is not

the object: for the video maker, the crux of the matter is that the legitimacy of the ideology does not automatically or of its own vindicate him, either formally or ethically, in any of his decisions on all the separate behind- or in-front-of-camera acts that constitute the shots which, together with sound, go into the production of a documentary — and, in particular, of a social documentary. This, for me, was the rub at Tiakeni. Admittedly, nothing as blatant as the concealment of coins in the garbage occurred, but still, certain practices were manipulatory, and at times scenes were set up to produce effects — mainly, as I shall relate in more detail in the next section of this essay, the presentation of confidence and self-assertion in the person facing the camera — which would not otherwise have been the case. So the Tiakeni documentary amounts, in Allan Sekula's phrase, to "pseudo-political affirmation"<sup>39</sup> — a realisation which has contributed directly to the composition of this report, with its attempt to comprehend some of the social implications of the professionalist model of TV production, and my underlying and repeated attempt to formulate suggestions for other and possibly more germane ways of making video technology work for the oppressed in South Africa.

Such suggestions will have to remain only suggestions here, I know. Attempts at a full theoretical exposition of each would not only develop rapidly beyond the bounds necessary to this report, but lack the authoritative grounding in practice vital to such argument. It may be indicative of the problems attendant on my initiating such projects from my present position within an embryonic Film and Television School at the university, but in the year or so since the completion of the Tiakeni documentary, I have not been able to put a single one of these ideas to the test in a concrete situation, and so to develop, modify or scrap any of them. At this stage, then, the best I can do is to name, for instance, a few of the more critical problems facing democratic video making in a specific Third World context:

What, if anything, could make video an appropriate technology in the poverty-stricken rural areas of South Africa? (When is video an appropriate medium, anyway, and why?) What could a training in video offer to the masses of rural blacks that would be in any way comparable to the value of straight, basic literacy for them? Under present political circumstances, how could someone like me — white, middle class, not particularly proficient in any of the vernacular languages — achieve and maintain the kind of equality of contact required by democratic dialogue? Then, too, considering the level of technical expertise and humanistic commitment necessary, how many people could ever possibly be available to carry through a video project which would so definitely depend on them? (The serpent bites its own tail. The critic's words rebound on him. "How many **video** Schweitzers could there be?")

In all, I am very aware of the shortcomings of this report. I feel that it would take years of continuous and intensive practice, alternating or combined with

rigorous critical reflection, before I might be able to contribute anything like a sound and useful theory of video practice to the struggle to emerge from capitalist domination and underdevelopment. The present report amounts to no more than a compound or multiple sketch of the ideas thrown up by my experience at Tiakeni. I am also, of course, aware of the risks involved in centring the report in myself and my own experience like this. But that was part of a conscious decision, an extension of my stepping into the front-of-camera space during the shooting at Tiakeni. For I had taken Barnouw's conclusions to heart: "And whether he adopts the stance of observer, chronicle, or whatever, (the documentarist) cannot escape his subjectivity. He presents his version of the world."<sup>40</sup> So, like Michael Rubbo, I decided to let my biases show and say "I" — even here, in an arena where objectivity is the rhetorical style sanctioned by convention and institution, the academic essay. In line with democratic theory, I would like to add that there are likely to be as many valid reports to be made on the production of a documentary as there are people involved in the shooting of it. All are subjects of the production, not the director alone. It is, of course, because of his commanding position within the conventional structure that the director is usually credited with the authoritative view of it. On that basis, I, again, am able to speak out on Tiakeni. But it must not be overlooked that the present paper has a dimension of significance to the dominant culture quite apart from any incidental merit of argument, contents or whatever, simply by virtue of its status as an Honours dissertation. A pass mark here assures me of a certain social mobility. None of the black people at the co-operative would have the opportunity to compose a report which could advance them materially in a comparable way. In all these pages, I am aware of their silence.

In spite of these manifest inadequacies and contradictions, however, if the report serves only to create a general impression of the precedence of the question of the actual methods of production as sociopolitical practices in their own right, then it will have succeeded in drawing due attention to an aspect most fundamental to production and yet most frequently overlooked, when media makers from the First World document the oppressed. Then, if, afterwards, the whole tangle of suggestions, analyses, criticisms and arguments advanced here could provide, like the bundle of *bloudraad* for a clay sculpture, an armature of sorts for future practice — even if only for my own — it will have fulfilled the essential function of a working paper. To propose conceptual starters, stimuli, schemas, for further work.

To re-enter a theoretical space, therefore. Once the "director" has disappeared in democratic video making, what remains is, then — as could, no doubt, be said of every living human being — the particular and continuously existing person as distinct from his role. Authentic equality, consistent with radical democracy, can only be predicated upon the irreducible value of the human being as subject, irrespective of social role.

Yet this is only to begin where the camera already begins — with the particularity of an actual person here, in front of camera, say, and of another there, behind it. The photograph (and by extension, the documentary video) is, as Sekula maintains “always the product of socially specific encounters between human-and-human . . .”<sup>41</sup> Democratic video making seeks to establish such encounters on a basis of absolute equality — opposing as vicious, fraudulent and corrupt, the ruling structures of a system like apartheid, in which categorical assumptions of human inequality are founded on the irrational bases of race and class. In democratic video making, the concept of the role — a key element in capitalist theories of production — is diminished if not ditched in favour of restoring the living human being to centrality of reference in production. Production now would be evaluated in terms of meeting the needs of the people, instead of the reverse applying as it does in everyday life, where the demands of production have to be accorded overriding importance, and people are evaluated in terms of what they have to offer production. Thus, the way would be cleared for people to define their own contribution to production, instead of themselves being defined by their role within it. The move is logically sound, too, for the person and the role are always discontinuous. In other words, although a person may assume a role, he and the role are never identical. Consequently, the professional TV director who identifies with his role is at least guilty, like Sartre’s famous writer in *Being and Nothingness*, of bad faith, a false front, inauthenticity of being. Still more obviously, perhaps, the camera itself can never record, say, a drill-press operator as such, but always some particular person as a drill-press operator. (Similarly, Bill Nichols, in *Ideology and the Image*, speaks of the front-of-camera participants in a documentary as “social actors”,<sup>42</sup> people in a role.) The camera in action is radically democratic.

It is the mark of consciousness to be able to transcend any situation and reflect on it.

It is the mark of freedom for the results of such reflection to be able to be put into action.

But not only are the people in democratic video-making the source of production — it is, after all, their ideas that are shot in the ways they suggest, while they may even handle the equipment themselves — but they are also in full control of it. Hence, even the aims of production initially discussed and agreed upon, can be criticised, altered, revised, if necessary, and tape can be reshot, in the people’s own time and at their will.

“No theory of production is neutral. Implicit to any such theory is always an image of man, as well as a political theory.”<sup>43</sup>

Man as the source of production which he also freely controls is man the creator. In democratic video production, therefore, the central image is necessarily of man the creator.



There can be no going back on this. Democratic video production is an attempt to abolish the contradiction found to be indispensable to the industrial paradigm of broadcast TV. No capitulation is possible to the repressive authoritarian relations developed by professional television. Let the stand here, then, be the same as that taken by the Central Committee of the French Communist Party after a three-day session devoted to ideological and cultural issues in March, 1966:

"What is a creator? Whether we consider music, poetry, the novel, drama, cinema, architecture, painting or sculpture, **the creator is not just a manufacturer of products whose elements are given in advance, he is not a mere arranger.** In every work of art, there is a part which is not reducible to a set of given data, and that part is the creative artist himself. A particular work of art could only have been produced by a particular writer, a particular artist. To imagine and create, that is what distinguishes man's potentialities from that of the animal." (Underlining inserted because the distinction being made at that point stresses precisely the difference between the creator and the factory worker, in terms of method.)

"... One should not, under any circumstances, limit the creator's right to research. That is why the requirements of literature and art to experiment should not be denied or hampered, as such an attempt would do grave harm to the development of human culture and indeed of the human mind."<sup>44</sup>

Although a mention of television is left out of the above list, and the Party statement antedates the widespread use of video, it is possible to subsume the electronic media under the category of cinema for the sake of convenience here, simply on the basis of a shared language.

More important to a theory of practice, though, is the insight that the imposition of any system of total control — whether at the macro-level, like the aesthetic policies of the Soviet State, or at micro-level, as in the strictly disciplined running of the television studio — must adversely affect the free development of human creativity.

But is the video maker an artist?

The terms are tricky. 'Art'. 'Artist'. Historically, cinematic discourse has tended to reject them as anachronistic, inappropriate — though not, perhaps, as always inapplicable. On the one hand, cinema since its earliest years has thrived independently of the classical arts, justifiably insisting on its difference of identity. On the other, cinematic statements themselves not infrequently achieve the significance, complexity and purposeful intensity associated with 'art' in the most powerful sense of the word.

Inescapably, there are ideological implications too, however. As Sekula points out:

"In capitalist societies, artists are represented as possessing a privileged

subjectivity, gifted with an uncommon union of self and labour. Artists are the bearers of an autonomy that is systematically and covertly denied the economically objectified mass spectator . . ."<sup>45</sup>

There can be no complacency. If the ruling ideas beyond the Iron Curtain remain tyrannical and impervious to change, that disastrous revolutionary paralysis in no way vindicates the far subtler and more devious methods of thought control rife in the West. As soon as privilege is accepted, so, too, is class distinction. So Sekula condemns — not subjectivity in itself, note — but "a privileged subjectivity". Essentially, it is the displacement of values under capitalism, and not the artist's unquestionable need for autonomy, that Sekula is attacking — the projection of the artist, not merely as one who must be integrated with his work in order that the work be produced at all, but as a precious spirit alone capable of attaining the heights of creative integration by the grace of his God-given talent and nothing else, and, consequently, of the futility of the masses' aspiring to their own coherent creative activity in life. Yet it must not be forgotten that exactly that "union of self and labour", so uncommon now, forms one of the major goals of liberation, as well as a source of inspiration in the revolutionary struggle. It marks the overcoming of alienation, the return of man to his world. A Marxist theory which tried to undercut it would inevitably only bring its own validity into question, apart from narrowing at the same time into an increasingly inhuman sterility.

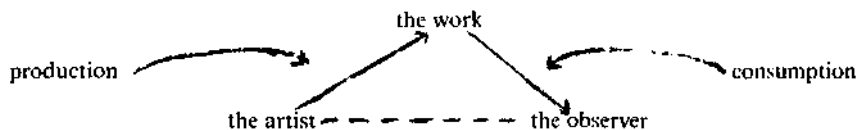
But — is the video maker an artist?

Fortunately, it is not necessary to pursue an answer through the intricacies of aesthetic theory. The point can be made and clinched simply enough as a matter of logic. All artists are creators, as all herons are wild birds. But, as not all wild birds in turn are herons, so not all creators are artists. A video maker must be a creator, but he need not, therefore, be an artist. In democratic video making, all who contribute are makers, creators.

Of course, this does not deny the possibility of there being autonomous video artists in their own right, like the Korean-born American, Nam June Paik. In fact, Paik, an outstanding artist, could immediately be cited as an example of Edmund Carpenter's "person of enormous power and sophistication", one capable of developing video's anarchistic potential as a brilliant weapon against the dominant modes of broadcast TV.

Then again, although democratic video production emphasises neither the process nor the product above the people taking part, there would be nothing to prevent it from culminating in a statement so powerful as to constitute art, or even in a product consciously part of the fine arts continuum. The problem as to what specific qualities may be necessary for a video programme to be classified as "art" is not at issue here — but the determinants of the relations of production

that result in the (art) work are. Monaco, in *How to Read a film*, proposes that the "rapports de production" at their most general social level be represented by a triangle connecting three key points — the artist, the work and the observer.<sup>46</sup>



The above "triangle" is an analogy and not geometry, of course: there is nothing strictly measurable about it. But because triangles as pure form concentrate on the most direct connections possible between three pre-determined points, they readily encapsulate the relations obtaining between these points, and can thus function as a sign of such relations.

Monaco calls this triangle the "triangle" of the artistic experience", and explains:

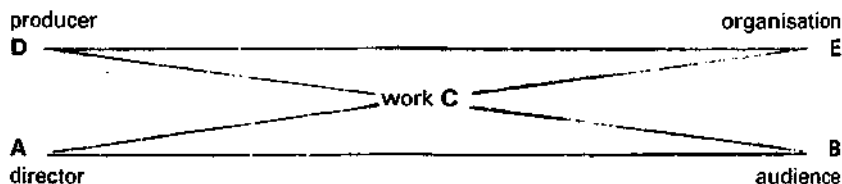
"An examination of the relationship between the artist and the work yields theories of the production of the art, while analysis of the relationship between the work and the observer gives us theories of its consumption. (The third leg of the triangle, artist-observer, is potential rather than actual)"<sup>47</sup>

A report like this qualifies both as theory of production, therefore, and as an attempt to actualise some of the potential lost by the missing "third leg" of the triangle. Some of the potential only, though. It amounts to no more than supplementary information, lacking in the video itself. Because a reading of the report can never occupy the same time-space frame as a viewing of the tape, it can obviously not be an immediate actualisation of the potential as achieved in a documentary like *The Sad Song of Yellow Skin*, where Michael Rubbo addresses the viewer directly in his own voice, as though person to person, in the commentary.

To return: the "artist" in Monaco's triangle undoubtedly refers to the cinema director as well, although even the most ardent champion of the *auteur* theory would not claim for the director the kind of autonomy attributable to an artist like Marcel Duchamp, say. In cinema production, there are always too many other indispensable people.

Basically, triangles are a useful means of clarifying certain relations, though. So, if we take Monaco's triangle and extend it by throwing out lines to make contact with two other points, the 'producer' and the 'organisation' — the relations with whom are essential, forming the two 'frameworks of determination' for the

director — a logically connected schema of triangles can be developed, offering a quick-guide diagram to the network of relations behind the shooting of a documentary like the one at Tiakeni.



Although any point could be chosen, and its connections read at a glance, let us again take the director as our point of reference. The inference immediately to be gained from the above grid is that the director is not alone in his relation to the work, but himself occupies only a single corner of a field cut across by interconnecting interests.

Now, five triangles can be discerned, relating to the director:

- 1 Triangle A C B: director-work-audience. (Monaco's triangle)
- 2 Triangle A C D: director-work-producer.
- 3 Triangle A D B: director-producer-audience.
- 4 Triangle A D E: director-producer-organisation.
- 5 Triangle A E B: director-organisation-audience.

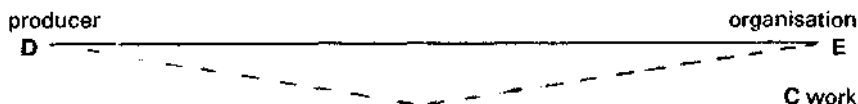
Of the five, only the first two produce the 'work' as the apex of their triangle. The rest simply pass through that point (C) in order to connect with the others. It would appear, therefore, that although the work remains central to the figure, the director's involvement with other points over and above the work could exclude and outweigh his straight relation with it. In addition, that 'straight relation' makes up no more than a single strand in the web of controlling relations. Every triangle, except ACB — which, on its own, would now seem misleading as an illustration of the "rapports de production" — connects the director to at least one point of power structurally his superior, which point can also connect without his mediation to the work itself (DE, EC). In concrete terms, the producer and the organisation are free to form expectations of the work without first referring to the director, but the director is not free to act without at the same time relating to their combined expectations (as AC connects with DC and EC at C). The fact that the director is subordinate both to the organisation and to the producer strengthens the status of their conceptions of the work, exerting pressure on the director to act in terms of their expectations. The grid could therefore be viewed as providing a graphic illustration of the structural constraints on the director's autonomy.

At its simplest, however, the grid is like an abacus of production relations. There is triangle  $ACD$  + triangle  $DCE$  + triangle  $ADB$  + . . .

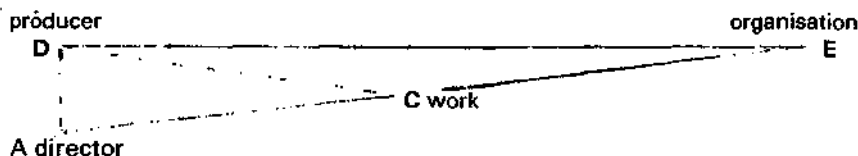
The shape of the overall figure produced, e.g. the rectangle  $ABDE$ , is contingent, an amalgam of the triangles concerned, but the basic unit, the triangle, is as replicable in its way as the brick in building: any number of triangles could be constructed and grouped together, depending on the relations that needed to be determined. For instance, the triangle director-work-crew could still be added. And the triangle director-work-(front-of-camera people). And so on. And if the relations under consideration at present had happened to be those of the actual shoot, instead of those which combined to make the shoot possible in the first place — the forces “behind” the shoot, so to speak, invisible on location but undeniably present all the same — then the triangles of the immediate situation as such would definitely have formed the prime focus of attention here.

So simple an abstraction as the figure  $AB(C)DE$  is static, outside of time. In order adequately to reflect the sequence of events and contacts that led to Tiakeni, provision would somehow have to be made for showing the steps in time. Perhaps progression could be indicated by isolating one section after another from the grid, in the due and correct temporal order. Following Monaco's example, arrows could be used to give direction to reading, and broken lines to suggest potential not yet realised.

So: Mark Orkin, acting for the producer, Rob Collins at Tiakeni, contacts the School of Dramatic Art, as film- and video-making organisation. What is essential to the development here is contained in the single triangle:



Once accepted and set as a project for the third-year Film and Television students, the as-yet unrealised programme is passed by Dr van Zyl to Greg Garden and then to me, and the following extension of relations begins to take form:



“Begins to take form” because this is still an early stage. It corresponds to the third entry in the preamble (p.      above), where I accepted the project without

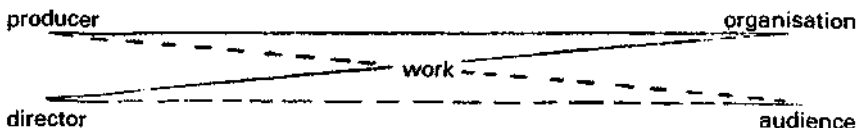
giving it a second thought. Note that although I was not fully aware that I had been constituted as director until we arrived at Tiakeni for the first shoot

I had been constituted as director until we arrived at Tiakeni for the first shoot (when Greg and Matthys would impress it on me in no uncertain terms), the role must needs be regarded as binding on me from the start. Product-centric structures dominate the people they include. The focus of all energy is on forging the product, and people become the means to this end.

The above triangle cannot be completed until the final contact has been made—contact between the director and the producer. At this stage, the actual character of the power relations between them, the direction of control as indicated by the arrow, can be seen to be still undecided. The crucial question is therefore whether all power will be vested in the producer, or whether some balance of power will be instituted between him and the director.

In terms of Tiakeni, however, we already know the answer. Ultimately, the power lay fully in the hands of Rob Collins. It is significant, for instance, that when I tried to inject a more critical spirit into the documentary, he did not have to listen to me.

As it affects the director, then, the final triangle of the relations behind the Tiakeni production would take the form of the solid-line half-section of the grid below:



In terms of which, the pressures resulting from both 'frameworks of determination' are concentrated on the director's head. He must put the product together, whatever the odds. The structure, determining his role in production, demands it.

Triangular conceptualisation, versatile enough to be applied to innumerable situations, need be developed no further here. It has proved its point and worth. There is no need in the present context to plot the triangles related to the audience, for instance. Anyone concerned with that perspective could do so himself.

\* \* \* \* \*

It is possible now, however, to proceed with the recommendations of this report. The aim of the recommendations is to outline a sounder basic procedure to be followed when a major cinematic project involving an external producer is to be undertaken by this department of the university; to suggest an acceptable balance of power between the director and the two frameworks of determination, and finally to emphasise the need for a widening of horizons in video work.

It will be recalled that it was on the basis of a single letter broadly, if charmingly, outlining a number of tempting schemes, that the department committed itself to a documentary on Tiakeni. The move was premature. Commitment to a project within a product-centric structure unquestionably implies, and thus tacitly guarantees, an end-product. It empowers the producer to expect everything of the director. This is risky if (as was the case at Tiakeni) the producer is inexperienced and has no knowledge at all of what goes into video production, but still retains control over the director. It means, among other things, that the director has no structural powers at his command for securing input to the production from the producer if and when this becomes necessary, but is forced to fall back on 'personal' requests, which may not be heeded. Take the issue of a script. A strictly planned and fully developed written script can be invaluable in the shooting of a documentary: it can form the conceptual blueprint for camerawork, when the director is confronted by the otherwise incoherent medley of events, locations and actions from which his cinematic statement is to be cut. Most frequently, however, the bulk of the information necessary to blocking out a first script resides solidly with the person proposing the work, i.e. the producer. It follows that at least a draft script should be required of the producer before a major project can even be thought of being undertaken by the department. Failing this, the situation becomes fraught with difficulty, for the script in particular tends to become the site of an unequal struggle between producer and director. The first recommendation of this report is therefore that **the acceptance of a project by the department remain provisional until a draft script has been approved by the director.** Before giving his approval, the director must embark on whatever research, reconnaissance trips, face-to-face negotiations and discussions with the producer, changes to the draft script, etc., he may perceive to be necessary. Without the director's approval, the department is not committed to the project.

As a corollary, the department may not hand the director a few stimulating but indefinite general ideas for production, guarantee an end-product, and then withdraw, relying on a deadline and the fact that its own reputation is at stake to pressurise the director into honouring the commitment. (If such an abuse of power characterised the department's attitude towards me over the Tiakeni documentary, I take it that the overriding reason was that the project had already been agreed upon some time before I joined.) In addition, early and repeated consultations between the department head and the director involved

in a major project would not only humanise relations within the first framework of determination, but also give the director the basic security of knowing exactly what his department would want.

The second recommendation concerns the problem of ideology. Inevitably, the ideology of any programme made by the department will be associated with the department (unless a disclaimer of ideological identity between the producer and the department were to be prominent among the credits). It is therefore in the department's own interests to maintain an awareness of the ideological dimension at all times, and to have ready at hand flexible ways of meeting the problem actively during production, if necessary. To begin with, in order to avoid inadvertent complicity with the producer's ideology — unavoidable if the simple grid of constraints on the director's autonomy (p. 47 above) is crudely in force — **the department should reserve the right to assume a critical stance in a documentary**, if the department as a whole should agree that such a stance were necessary. Clearly, the decision to include a critical factor in the approach to a programme would have to be made early — before final approval of the draft script — and the producer would have to agree, or the programme might not be able to go ahead at all. But then if, on the shoot, serious divergences from the approved script were to begin to take hold and develop ideological implications far beyond what could possibly have been envisaged by the department initially, or, again, if practices were urged upon the director which would place the credibility of the documentary and its makers at risk for the sake of ideology, the director, as the department's representative, would have to be able to re-invoke the critical option. In other words, breach of contract by the producer on location could immediately and legitimately be counteracted by the director, backed in his decisions by the full authority of his department.

Retaining the right to criticise does no more than uphold the autonomy of the university in its quest for truth, of course. In effect, however, it also protects the status of the department as a cinema-making concern, for it does not permit it to be regarded merely as a cheap alternative for those who "cannot afford . . . a full-blown commercial treatment".<sup>48</sup> And importantly, in terms of what is being said about reality by means of a documentary, it creates a balance in the 'triangle' of power between producer, organisation and director.

The producer is the financial backer — a relationship which looks compellingly simple when reduced to a matter of Rands and cents, but which is actually far from simple if it means the introduction of commercial values into the functioning of a university department. For instance, even the irrefutable fact that our department needs money for new equipment, and for its own independent 16mm film productions, and so on, does not of itself justify the conclusion that the department should therefore earn money by making certain class projects double as products for cash. In the first place, the use of unpaid but compulsory student labour might well be construed as exploitative. In the



second, the demands of commercial work tend readily to overwhelm and suspend the validity of the academic structure itself — ironically enough, for instance, by removing the students' right to fail and not even complete a production. The third recommendation is, then, that **if a production is undertaken for money, it should be voluntarily crewed, and all work on it done outside of standard class hours.** If ordinary classes are to work for an external producer at all, they should do so on the understanding with the producer that a product is to be attempted, not guaranteed, and that the emphasis will be on the process of carrying the production through to a conclusion, rather than on culminating in a saleable, high-quality commodity. The cost of such class projects would have to be borne by the department itself, but the mastertape and copyright would in the end remain with the department. The external producer could then, perhaps, negotiate to purchase replay rights from the department at a fair price.

A major theme of argument throughout this paper has been that the paradigm of professionalism is not the only authentic one for video production. It follows that the simulation of professional conditions in the training of students is not self-evidently the best mode of teaching, but simply reigns as such as a result of the department's short-term, common-sense goal of trying to ensure that students are equipped to work in the industry after graduating. A university, however, has not only a supportive role to play in society, but also a progressive one, linked to research. Potentially, there is far more to video than its exploitation by the professionals of commerce and broadcasting will allow. The trigger videos and radical-democratic documentaries outlined above are only two possibilities for development. There are bound to be more. The final recommendation of this report is, therefore, that **video be released from the confines of the professional as the only paradigm, and encouraged to enter and explore as well exactly those areas closed to the professionals.** Democratic video-making among rural black people, for example, where the subject is sought in the objective needs of the social situation as articulated by the people directly involved, and the determining criterion for organising the shoot is not how the professionals would manage it, but how appropriate the relations inherent in a particular production practice might be to the situation being documented.

The central thesis to the entire paper here is that cinema production is cultural action, with its source, most often, in the creative co-operation of a group of people. If video, however, is to become cultural action for freedom, its core problem emerges as one of method: how to turn documentary production, for instance, from a means of generating persuasive ideological statements about the world, into praxis, and a means of people's transforming and expressing the world. Itself marginalised as a force by the dominance of broadcast TV, video production could in all likelihood realise its most powerful potential in political alliance with the masses marginalised by the capitalist economy of a state like South Africa.

These, then, are the thoughts arising from the experience of making the Tiakeni documentary. But what of the documentary itself?

What happened during production to provoke this response? What is the end-product like?

These questions, and others like them, form the impetus for the remainder of the essay.

*The only film journal organized thematically*

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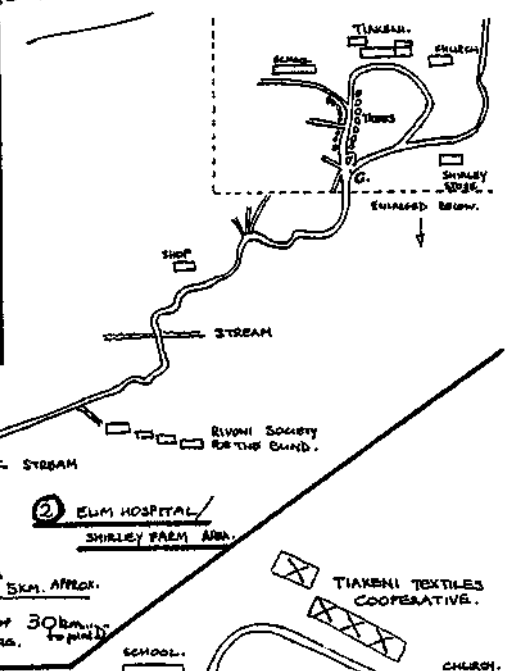
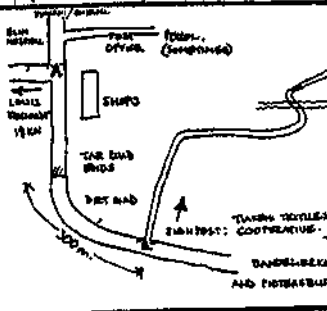
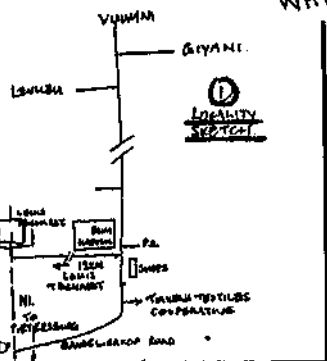
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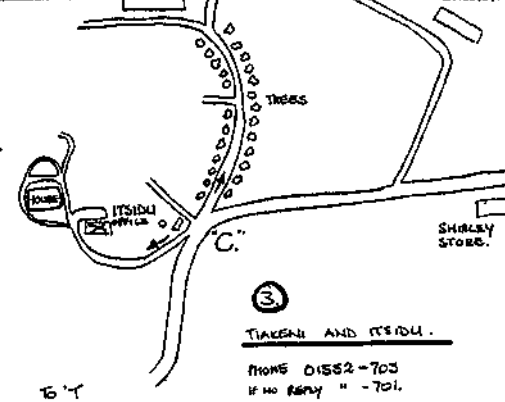
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WHICH WAY — "A" OR "B"?



Follow N1 after Pietersburg, ~30 km before Louis Trichardt see Lalapanzi Hotel RHS then 1 km Elim turnoff RHS, i.e. Banderlierkop road (D in sketch 1), dirt for ~30 km to Elim Hosp. 100m before tar begins right at 'B' in sketch 2, then 5 km up hill to Tiakani. If you start going steep downhill you missed Tiakani. OR:

Continue on N1 past 1st Elim turnoff ~4 km before Louis Trichardt then right at sign Elim Hosp 18 km, to 'T' junction marked A on sketch 2. Turn right, 200m then tar ends then 100m on dirt until Tiakani Text Coop sign on LHS. Turn left carry on a top of hill to Tiakani. Don't go downhill or you have missed Tiakani at point 'C' on sketch 2 & 3.



To 'T' JUNCTION ELIM HOSPITAL/BANDERLIERKOP (point 'B')

③  
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# Two routes to Tiakeni

What interests me essentially is **why** films turn out as they do — and why one route is followed in preference to another.<sup>1</sup>

*Alan Rosenthal, The New Documentary in Action: a Casebook in Film Making.*

## The First Attempt

### Preproduction

We drove to Tiakeni in two kombis that Sipiwe managed to get on loan from the university's vehicle-maintenance centre. One was a stertorous, rattletap crate destined to break down completely on the homeward journey and to be abandoned by Greg and the others just as it stood. The other, although in slightly better condition, still tended to pant and flag on the uphill, and then, sailing downhill, to be buffeted broadside-on by crosswinds that made it feel light on the ground and unsteady, despite its cargo of passengers and equipment.

It is at least a six-hour drive from the campus to Tiakeni. At first, the route is dead straight along the State highway, but that peters out shortly before Warmbaths, and then, after the town, the road narrows and winds through low hills, before issuing into the heat of the droughtstricken bushveld for the remaining monotonous two-thirds of the journey. Near Louis Trichardt, however, you have a choice: either to turn off immediately and travel the rest of the way on sand roads, or to stay with the tar for some time longer, and approach Tiakeni from the curve round north. either way, once you have turned off the main road and crossed a stretch of plain veld, the landscape changes, almost before you know it, into the rolling foothills of the Drakensberg. The change is as marked as the difference between worlds: the parched and intransigent flatness of the bushveld, with its sparse grey bush and crooked trees rimed with thorn, suddenly gives way to the more exhilarating air and richer greenery of hill country, and the fuller rhythms of upliftment and fall. Tiakeni, the factory, is set in the world of the Drakensberg escarpment.

In the blue kombi, the rattletap, Greg Garden, as film tutor, was accompanied by Matthys Mocke, a part-time tutor, and five students — Giulio Biccari, Lee Harvey, Claire Swartzberg, Philippa Torr and Andrew Worsdale. In the other, the 'new' kombi, I, as assistant-lecturer in charge of TV production, was

accompanied by Siphwe Khumalo, the department's general technician at that stage, and only two students — Brenda Weimers and Julius Mtsaka — because the back was packed high with all the equipment. Siphwe and I shared the driving. We spoke desultorily on the journey, I remember — Siphwe, Brenda, Julius and I. I was intent, alert, but also uneasy.

We had lost more time than we could afford. It was Saturday already, and we should actually have made the trip on Thursday afternoon. Over the past week, I had done what I could — mainly, checking and organising personally every last item of equipment. Anything needing repair, e.g. the portable TV monitor, had been repaired. Admittedly, one of the two portapak batteries was not holding its charge, going dead after a few minutes' use — and since the department had refused to lay out the cash for a new one, I had no choice but to rely mainly on the one that was functioning. But that was not particularly a cause for anxiety. TV field cameras can run for hours off car batteries, and we had two vehicles we could exploit for DC power, if necessary. We would be using two cameras, but the department's own single-tube Panasonic WV 3300 E was intended only occasionally to form a back-up for the outstanding three-tube electronic field production camera that I had managed to borrow for the weekend, the JVC 2000 BE.

Dissatisfied with the Panasonic's poor colour reproduction, I had spent weeks casting around for a really robust, superior-quality EFP camera, like the RCA TK-76 that I had been accustomed to using on outside recordings for Central Television, as such a camera might boost the production to professional level. I thought I had certainly laid hold of the right thing in the JVC, which was recommended to me as doing its job reliably under the roughest conditions and consistently producing excellent results. Among the points that attracted me in the production pamphlet on the camera, for instance, were the following:

- Rugged construction with diecast aluminium body.
- compact and lightweight with well-balanced weight distribution when held on the shoulder — ideal for ENG/EEP applications.”<sup>2</sup>

The camera, I found, could run for two hours, i.e. exactly three times the normal 40 minutes, off a standard 12-volt portapak battery. But, because I was travelling hundreds of kilometres to Tiakeni to do a shoot lasting several days without the customary technical support of an engineer — and because I had had plenty of experience of the temperamentality of high-grade electronic equipment on even the most routine work — I took care not to be too impressed by sales-talk, and to check for rationality behind the jargon wherever possible. For instance: ‘What difference does a ‘diecast aluminium body’ make, anyway?’ I wanted to know. The answer was provided a little later in the production pamphlet.

"The aluminium diecast body gives full protection from shocks. Inside the shock-resistant housing, the circuit components are less liable to damage and the optical system is not subject to possible misalignment, even in rugged ENG handling."<sup>3</sup>

This was a claim which proved to be neither idle nor exaggerated. When the camera was accidentally dropped nearly two metres slam on to its head on the concrete floor of the factory, its image production did not go askew. That is not what went wrong with it on the Tiakeni shoot, at all.

Two other things were worrying me as we drove to Tiakeni that interminable Saturday afternoon, however. They were like gaps, blanks in my grasp of the situation. One was the lack of a script. (Again, that was no real cause for anxiety, I told myself. Rob had promised a script, and a shooting script ought to be able to be developed quickly from a draft, for close consultation with the scriptwriter would be possible on the spot.) The other was the fact that I had not done a recce, had not already explored the sites where we would be shooting, and so had no idea what technical complications might lie ahead. My only excuse, I realised as I mentally kicked myself, was that I had no means of transport of my own, since my car had been stolen a few months before, while the prospect of dragging up to Louis Trichardt and back by train one weekend had been unappealing, cumbersome, if not impractical.

Besides, if only we had been able to adhere strictly to the shooting schedule I had drawn up at the outset, a separate trip for a recce would not have been necessary. According to the schedule, if we had left for Tiakeni directly after lunch on Thursday, we would have arrived in the evening with enough time in hand to give the script a fairly thorough once-over, before beginning the shoot early the next morning. With four full days at our disposal — Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday — there would have been ample time to encounter and solve the kinds of problem usually exposed by a recce. Time too, to hammer out a worthwhile script, as well as to view the action on location before having to decide on the best approach to shooting. Rob Collins had, in fact, known of my plan and approved it. In one of our several telephone conversations, he had even mentioned the possibility of the co-op workers' putting in a Sunday shift for the sake of the camera. I had pressed eagerly for implementation of the idea, outlining how great a boon it would be.

Then, on Monday, May 17, I phoned to confirm the dates of our stay at Tiakeni as May 20, 21, 22, 23 and 24, and Rob had agreed to the arrangement without any difficulty. But, the day after next, he phoned back to ask whether we could not put off our arrival for "a day or two": other guests were staying with them until the weekend, he explained apologetically. I felt squeezed into

postponing the shoot altogether, but couldn't, because I had already done so once before at Rob's request. Originally, the shoot had been set for the week just past, May 13 to 17, but the Collinses had been unable to accommodate us then, either. I couldn't chop and change now at the last minute again without creating a false impression of organisational disarray, as well as making things difficult for the students with the rest of the department in terms of getting out of classes, and so bringing the Film and Television side of the department into conflict with the Drama side. I suspected, too, that another postponement would shake everyone's confidence, and begin to undermine motivation in the project altogether. Reluctantly, therefore, I decided to take the risk and cut the time by nearly half, icily aware that I would now have to compress the entire shoot into Sunday and Monday, with the addition, perhaps, of the Saturday afternoon of our arrival. It did not occur to me that Rob himself might be hoping for a reprieve.

"You will have the script ready, won't you?" I inquired.

"Sure," he replied, and made various other reassuring and conciliatory noises over the phone.

At about 3.15 on the afternoon of Saturday, May 22, then, the two kombis laboured up the driveway and past a rambling mansion of an old farmhouse, swung round to the back and parked. Hoisting myself stiffly out of the cab of our kombi, I took the long step down to the ground, and went to meet Rob and Anne, who had come out to welcome us.

My first impression of Rob was of a tall, dark-haired man with a beard, and a shy way of running his fingers through his beard. Later, I found him to be unquestionably gentle, but also ambitious and determined to get his own way. Anne, tall, fair-haired, quite beautiful, I found to be a perceptive and kindly person with a self-deprecating sense of humour.

Anyway — we introduced ourselves, unpacked what had to be unpacked, and then took the opportunity of sitting or lying sprawled around in the shade of the spacious verandah. Rob took his place in a wicker armchair at the centre of the group. As soon as the clamour of settling down had abated somewhat, all attention was turned to him. He sat with his hands linked together loosely across his chest, speaking calmly and quietly, and his words struck me with consternation.

"You want to know about the script," he remarked. "Well, there isn't one."

## **Production**

Sunday morning. Nothing in particular to do, so we tested the equipment. The red warning light blinked incessantly when the portapak VCR was switched on. Greg was of the opinion that dew had condensed inside the machine. He and Matthys discussed taking the whole thing apart, but finally contented themselves with plucking out the battery, regarding it dubiously for a moment, and then clipping it back in again.

Of the two batteries, one was as dead as expected, despite a brief boost from



the Tiakeni generator the night before, while the other, fully charged when we had left, was now registering a current inexplicably weak and tremulous.

Siphiwe and I checked the microphones. At least they were functioning properly. The verandah was dominated by Siphiwe's voice, breathy and magnified, at full volume.

"Hello? Hello, hello, hel-lo? Testing, testing. One, two, three, four . . . ." Needless to add, the co-op workers were not going to put in a special shift that Sunday for the sake of the camera.

We had spent more than an hour the previous afternoon discussing the situation with Rob. Although much remained that was still too vague and general, certain of the points central to production had emerged quite clearly. One was the question of style. Style forms a touchstone in the movie maker's approach to what is to be shot — the influential 'how' of what is to be said. And what Rob wanted had a strong affinity with the subject matter of a rural factory, I felt.

"I want a film that will be seen to have been made by people," he stated emphatically. "Not commercial, glossy, slick — no!"

I nodded gladly, wide awake to the stipulation. I, too, preferred the palpably rough, direct and decisive handling characteristic of most mainstream materialist documentary practice, to the long smooth bolus of a junk commodity turned out by those who believe in reducing the viewer to a gullible consumer.

The completed video, I had gathered in previous discussions with Rob and confirmed again now, was to constitute an introduction to Tiakeni, as seen through student eyes. But the student factor itself had somehow begun to assume more importance than I had expected. It was almost as though it amounted to a guarantee of ideological authenticity. 'Here is a group of students,' the tacit presentation appeared to be: 'highly critical and politically-aware young people. Of their own accord, they came to Tiakeni, toting a camera, determined to document what they observed at firsthand.'

And what they observed was (or would be), of course, the success story of Tiakeni.

Tiakeni was a success story, I knew. But most of my students were politically neutral; the project had unequivocally been given to them (as much as to me), and the slant of the documentary was actually going to be positive, not investigative.

I began to feel restless and wanted to argue it out.

At that point however, the idea was conceived of using the Panasonic to record the JVC in action — and I jumped at it. In the editing, I knew, I would be able to cancel out the Panasonic's peculiar colour by switching to black-and-white. The master tape, then, would be coded both in colour and in black-and-white — colour for the Tiakeni documentary as such, black-and-white for the footage on the shooting of the documentary. The implications were arresting, offering as they did a dialectical interplay of significance between the two levels of what would be recorded. It would be video looping back on itself, so to speak.

and exposing the process of making the video being watched. The documentary would literally be seen to be the outcome of a particular group of people's work with a camera, for instance, which might sharpen the viewer's critical insight into what takes place on a TV screen as in fact a matter of others' choice. The complexity of the alienation-effect alone promised to be intriguing.

After the initial shock of Rob's announcement that there was no script had worn off, I could admit to myself that in some way I must have known all along that there would probably be no script. Well, what now? Logically, the only option left was simply to rely on the organised structure of the work process itself to provide a basis of predictable action upon which the camerawork could be developed. The human encounter central. I realised, to a documentary programme on a co-operative, could surely consist in interviews with the workers, while Rob could add a voice-over commentary later, if he felt like writing one. But I would, I decided, have to follow in detail the progress through the factory from raw material to packaged product — the laying out of the bolt of cloth, the silk-screening, the drying and lifting and kiln-baking of the printed material, the cutting and sewing and folding and parcelling. I would shoot the auxiliary activities, too. The dyeing. Designing. Ink-mixing. The rinsing of the silk-screens at the end of a session . . . And so on.

The essential soundness of this decision was revealed only afterwards, during the second shoot when, despite having a typed-out script in hand and adhering undeviatingly to the shooting script derived from it, I found myself following in my own footsteps around the factory. So precisely did my movements on the two separate occasions correspond, in fact, that during the editing it was sometimes possible to include a good close-up or cutaway or even part of a sequence from the first shoot into footage from the second, without too noticeably disturbing the continuity.

At length, however, the conversation on the verandah that Saturday afternoon, wound down, and we asked Rob whether it would be possible to do some shooting right away. He thought for a moment, and then suggested that we all go to "Margy's place", a short way up the road. Margy, he told us, was one of the ablest workers in the co-op, and spoke English fluently. We could interview her on her role in the co-op, and then on the role of the co-op in her life.

Nearly an hour before sunset we arrived at the homestead, a cluster of thatched huts on a ridge with a magnificent view across the escarpment valley to distant mountains that were almost one with the calm blue of the sky. While we waited for Margy, who wasn't home, we began to set up the equipment, intending to record some of the traditional patterns drawn into the smooth, dry, flat and cleanswept cowdung-plaster floor of the courtyard, since the motifs of Tiakeni textiles were based upon such patterns. Some of the students scattered around, looking into the only building that was not a wattle-and-daub hut, a flat-roofed concrete-brick structure that stood in the middle of the yard and dominated everything. We did try some shooting, but the patterns in the floor

proved to be worn and faint, and light was going in any case, and I had just decided that there was no point in continuing, when suddenly, out of one of the huts swept a middle-aged woman in funereal black, with a broad black shawl flung around her shoulders. She didn't stop moving, but began gesticulating and clutching at the air with histrionics worthy of the chorus in a Greek tragedy.

"You people come here," she panted in a hoarse, deep voice, her bosom heaving. "You don't ask! You take pictures. But where is the money? **Where is the money?**"

Rob tried in vain to calm her down. She stared at him stonily and repeated: "Where is the money? Give us money!"

It turned out that she was Margy's mother-in-law. Among other things, she was deeply affronted that we had not obtained permission from her son — "a policeman at John Vorster Square" — before attempting to shoot on his property. Acting on his own initiative, Andrew Worsdale tape-recorded the whole of her outburst, but Rob, once he knew, was upset to think that we might use it, and after our return to Johannesburg, did not rest until I had mailed the tape back to him.

So our first attempt at shooting at all had foundered. We spent the evening after supper arguing inconclusively as to what shots might work best to open the documentary. Then, in preparation for the next day, I briefly outlined my role as shadow director again, and put forward my plan that the students should rotate, taking directing, camera, audio, continuity, etc., in turn. Since it was the students' first venture outside of a television studio, and their first major production ever with the portapak equipment, I wanted their experience to be as broad and busy and intense as possible. Greg and Matthys objected, however. To them, this approach was unheard-of. The true paradigm, they maintained, was that of the professional shoot. Everybody should have a fixed role. I should be director.

"**Sombdy** must take responsibility," Greg said pointedly.

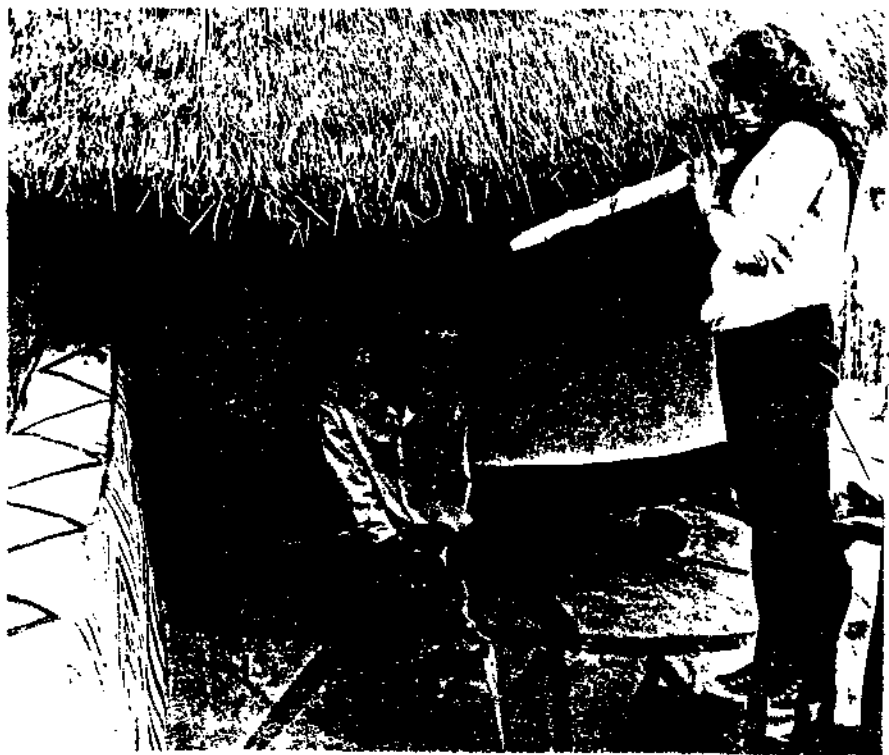
It made little difference to me to shift from supervising the directing to being the actual director, but that was as much as I was prepared to concede. It was inconceivable to me that priority could be accorded to the product over the process in a learner-centric situation, a class project. The students would rotate.

Quite early on Sunday morning, we were ready for the shoot. The VCR had righted itself as soon as a couple of switches were returned to their proper positions. The good battery had been left to charge, and when at eleven o'clock Rob came forward with the suggestion that we go to "Gladys's place", we checked and found it brimming with power.

Gladys was supervisor of the co-op that year. (The workers rotate administrative posts annually, so that no elite can solidify to separate 'management' and 'workers'.) The homestead lay in a fold of the hills northwest of Tiakeni, and was laid out on the same lines as the one we had been to the day before — a loose circle of huts dominated at one end by a two-roomed, rectangular, concrete-brick joint. But the whole place looked more rundown

than Margy's, and seemed to be sagging in the heat. The blue numbers of resettlement were painted on the doors. (The police kept — keep — an eye on homes with marked doors. Any sign of maintenance, the Collinses told us, like replastering a wall or fixing the thatch, is an offence punishable with fines and/or imprisonment. So the huts become wretched and ramshackle, while the people, faced with an alien and uncertain future, and impotent in the present, become the baffled and demoralised dwellers in rural slums. It is not known for sure, for instance, exactly when their removal will take place, but it could be next month, or the next. Or not for a few years.)

It was here that we were to record one of our strongest political statements, in the presentation to camera of Gladys's husband, Hlengani. Paradoxically it was here, too, that I first became aware with some perplexity that all was not well with the method of production that I was actually already using. My misgivings were not caused simply by the hackneyed fact of the intrusion of strangers from the dominant culture with their stranger-yet technological equipment into a Third World scene, but rather by the realisation that for all our goodwill (and theirs), the people in front of the camera had no structural means at their command with which to control what would be said about them through the



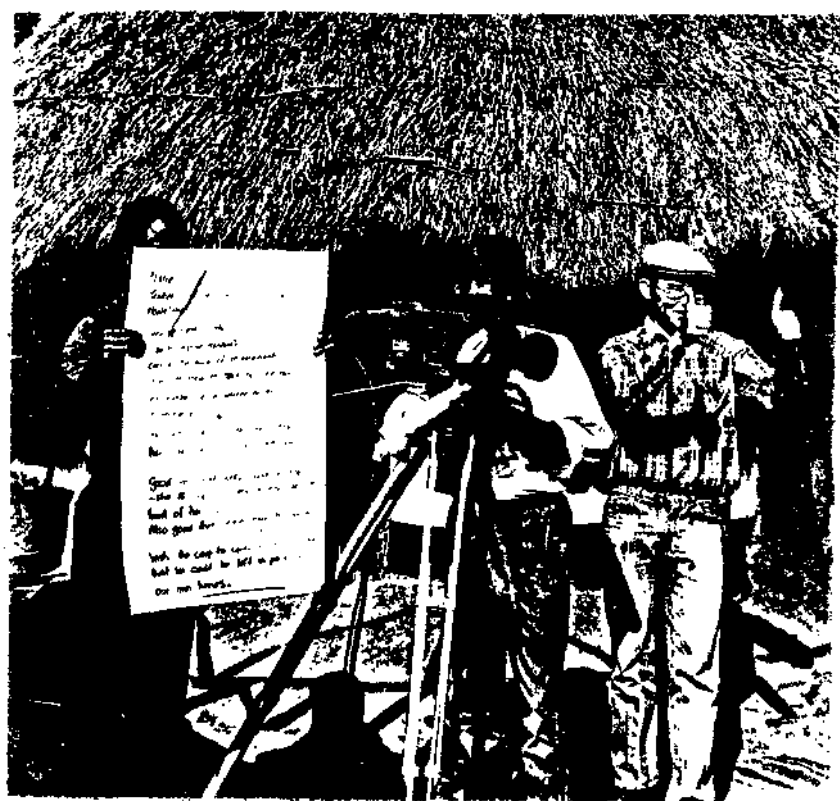
documentary. To me, the clearest evidence of this was offered by the production relations reigning between the director and the people in front of the camera. I had the power to stop, start, alter position and angle, reshoot. Gladys and Hlengani had to look to me for direction, the way to act. (See again the ten Freirean "contradictions" listed above, on page 36.) And months later, during my reading for the Honours course, I came to realise, too, that any professional TV team going into a rural South African situation like this — a situation which they might hope to 'expose', 'report on', etc., but could never hope really to change — would themselves in their shooting not only undoubtedly impose without a second thought structures favourable to the dominant culture, but also, in all likelihood, perpetrate the kind of outrage noted by James Agee, fifty years ago, when he and Walker Evans had completed their assignment to document the plight of sharecroppers and others destroyed by land-hungry banking corporations in a single move of expropriation during the American Depression. Walker Evans's still photographs are models of cool perfection, graced with compassion, investing the people facing camera with great dignity. Agee's pages of captioning deepen the reader's basic humanity by extending an insight into the elemental tragedy of the situation being photographed. But not before Agee has doggedly, painfully, remorselessly, dragged all the arguments, rationalisations, lofty ideological justifications and mere rhetoric persistently brought forward in support of such ventures, through all their twists and turns, to a recognition of their common root.

"It seems to me curious, not to say obscene and thoroughly terrifying," he writes, "that it could occur to an association of human beings drawn together through need and chance and for profit into a company, an organ of journalism, to pry intimately into the lives of an undefended and appallingly damaged group of human beings, an ignorant and helpless rural family, for the purpose of parading the nakedness, disadvantage and humiliation of these lives before another group of human beings, in the name of science, of 'honest journalism' (whatever that paradox may mean), of humanity, of social fearlessness, for money, and for a reputation for crusading and unbiased which, when skilfully enough qualified, is exchangeable at any bank for money (and in politics, for votes, job patronage, abelincolnism, etc\*), and that these people could be capable of meditating this prospect without the slightest doubt of their qualification to do an 'honest' piece of work, and with a conscience better than clear, and in virtual certitude of unanimous public approval."

Agee's footnote is laconic, demonstrating the same truth concealed in every cranny: "Money." Professionalism, it struck me, can be the smoothest, most plausible guise of the profiteer.

It took us the rest of Sunday to set up and record satisfactorily the statements made to camera by Gladys and Hlengani.

There was never any question of portraying them as victims. On the contrary, much time was taken up by Rob's efforts to establish the opposite: to get Hlengani, for instance, to relax and assert himself, looking straight into camera, and to speak out with full personal authority on resettlement.



Thus, clearly, an attempt was being made to reverse the polarity in documenting the oppressed, from negative to positive. Our intention was to depict the rural poor under apartheid not as degraded, mute, crushed and suffering, but as strongly forthright and self-confident people, articulate and prepared to question and resist, if necessary, the force of political circumstance. Insofar as this was no more than a change in image, it was inadequate, I knew. I could see that before my eyes the whole production might become an interpretation imposed on the situation for the sake of an apparent proof of the ideology — a soft-sell for socialism. An obscure sense of certainty provoked the thought that video would definitely have to work in a radically different way among the oppressed if an affirmation of the people's voice and presence were to become a real and not merely an apparent demonstration of the progressive value of socialism. But I would have no time to explore this intuition until many

months later, when the Tiakeni production was over.

To Rob's disappointment, neither Gladys nor Hlengani — nor anyone else at the co-operative, later — could actually present themselves to camera with the vigorous and natural air of personal command that he had had in mind. But for anyone but a seasoned TV presenter, so direct an encounter with the camera as having to stare back at the lens trained on you only a metre or two away, readily induces intense self-consciousness. Trapped by the camera's fixed focusing on you, you are drawn into seeing yourself totally as an object of others' perceptions: in other words, your subjective experience of self is contradicted. Overwhelmed, you go empty, blank. So I was not surprised when both Gladys and Hlengani found it impossible to remember what they had intended to say, or ran into difficulties and lost track of their words, winding up embarrassed — Gladys, convulsed with laughter.

Rob drew up cue cards. He was very active and concerned, sitting with Hlengani in the oppressive stuffiness of the concrete rooms, and charting out with him all the important themes. Then he wrote the key words in black koki on poster-size white cardboard.

"My name is Hlengani Mashemse. I stay here."

On the mastertape, Hlengani's voice is strong and clear as the camera pans across a field of standing mealie with a group of huts in the middle distance, and keeps moving smoothly and steadily as another hut emerges in the immediate foreground, with two shy and friendly children in close-up, standing by a low wall and looking over it.

"I'm a teacher at Ngalailume School, about one and a half hour's drive from here by car. Ngalailume means . . ."

There is a jump-cut into the pan — occasioned in the editing by no more than a dearth of material, but perhaps appropriately abrupt here — to a mid-shot of Hlengani. He is seated quite formally upright against the wall of the hut, physically on a lower plane than the children, so that for a moment we seem almost to share their point of view of him. While the children were warm and close, however, the man is more distant, and looks stern and cold in his square presentation of himself to camera. Then, because of a slight zoom out, we notice that he keeps his hands awkwardly and defensively on his knees. His eyes are like slits in his face. Although Hlengani's eyes never quite make contact with the viewer's, they flick restlessly back and forth, and his voice by the end of the speech is fraught with rage.

"Ngalailume means that the lion bites. I grew up here. I'm happy with my home, I (would) like to improve my dwellings, but I cannot, because of resettlement. I'm forced to . . . Maybe we will be moved to township some day. You can see the police numbers there, painted on the door." He points. Cut-away to a handheld shot of the door with the number 54 painted on it. "Maybe we can be removed at any time. But we don't know **when**. And I don't know **why**."

Cut to darkness and a roaring confusion, which gradually resolves itself into a black-and-white sequence of a recording being made with the JVC in the workshop of Tiakeni's mechanic, Andries. The general effect of the Hlengani section as such is rough, direct, grainy, however. The cut to darkness is quite dramatic.

Hlengani's speech lasts about as long as it takes to read: less than a minute. Brief as it is, the section is a composite sequence put together from three different takes, themselves only part of several hours' work resulting in two full 20-minute U-matic videotapes.





Greg grew increasingly withdrawn and critical as the day wore on. I tried to get him to laugh at the 'Third World' qualities of the shoot, but his attitude remained grave and cool. Greg believes in absolute discipline and a tight hierarchical structure during production. I, on the other hand, felt that in this case it was more important to keep the students alert, questing, active and free, than to circumscribe them with heavy-handed directorial control and let them stew in the slough of resentment and lethargy characteristic of TV crews in the industry. I allowed Giulio Biccari to do a face-to-face interview with Hlengani, simply because he had a hunch that it might work (though it didn't) — despite an earlier decision to avoid that kind of interview. I allowed Andrew Worsdale to climb on to the roof of the concrete rooms and execute the 360-degree pan he was eager to do. (Part of which came in useful as a transitional device later, in the editing.) I encouraged Claire Swartzberg to do hand-held cutaways of anything that caught her eye as interesting: a stack of firewood with a rooster perched on it; the hand-drawn patterns on the walls; a child walking with a blue plastic bucket of water balanced on her head. All of this in the lags between setting up takes with Gladys and Hlengani.

Soon, Greg did not want to hang around any more. He requested permission to take the Panasonic to the church and record the women singing. I was only too glad to give it: I knew how important it would be. (Ultimately, the entire musical soundtrack was to be taken from what was recorded that day.) But as Greg and Matthys swung the kombi round and drove off, I realised that a schism had occurred between them and me. I was sincerely sorry, but could do nothing about it. I had too much else on my hands at the time.

In fact, I was in a real fix. My proudest acquisition for the shoot, the JVC 2000 E, was acting up. The long rough ride along dirt roads, together with that morning's dip through a *vlei* and then the slow jolting across acres of veld to the homestead, had disturbed the delicate back-focus mechanism, which was no longer relating in sync to the front-focus: which meant that the camera could not hold its focus properly, except in close-up. I tried to set it right several times, but I am the simplest and crudest of technicians. I learn machine-functions and maintenance slowly and painfully, if thoroughly. The back-focus was beyond me. As a 'software' person in a TV studio, I had been accustomed to relying on the trained engineers of the 'hardware' crew to keep the electronic machinery in trim, until now. And now I was sunk.

Later that afternoon, too, the automatic iris jammed wide open. I switched to manual, but not before damage had been done to the recorded material. In all the pictures of Gladys, for example, there is a 'hot spot' on her forehead, a shiny black ripple, wriggling like a snake.

That night I did not sleep. I was too 'wired up', as American movie makers say, by all the unpredictable contingencies on production. My head was teeming with all sorts of ideas, suppositions and wild guesses, as I tried to encompass and fortify myself with plans against whatever might lie in wait for us the next day. The chances of success were absurdly less than minimal. In a quarter of the time

originally set aside for it, we would have to try and document completely the Tiakeni factory at work, with a camera that was 80% useless. Was it worth continuing? It might be. If — and only if — this were to be a recce for a later, more carefully mounted production.

After everyone else had turned in for the night, I lay outside, on my back in the grass, until I felt that you could well be looking down into the stars from here. I got up, and walked to a tree at the top of the hill. The valley was filled with giant shadows. With a keen sense of curiosity, I thought of Orson Welles, whom I jokingly regarded as my spiritual great-uncle, another insomniac who could never sleep while a movie of his was in production, but would stand at his hotel window and stare out, like a massive stranded hulk.



Next morning, bright and early, Greg and Matthys set up the Panasonic outside the long lowslung building that was the Tiakeni factory, and shot our arrival in Rob's microbus. First the long avenue of trees, then the white bus as it appeared from the left and sped through between them, emerging into the open and heading straight at the camera for a while, then swinging around in a wide curve through the long grass and parking, finally, before the factory doors. In a moment, the students climbing out, carrying equipment, tripod, lights, caniera . . . It was, at last, our opening shot.

As soon as I set foot in the factory, however, I wanted to thrust everything else out of my mind and concentrate solely on what I had worked out in advance: the laying out of the cloth, the printing, drying, lifting and baking — the factory processes that were to constitute the vital core of the documentary. This proved impossible until most of the student band had left for Johannesburg with Greg and Matthys in the battered blue kombi after morning tea. Then, with that great burden lifted, I felt I could get down to work. Only Sipiwe, Claire and Brenda had elected to stay when I said I was going to spend an extra day — or rather, an extra morning at Tiakeni. I couldn't afford a whole day — in an effort to get things done.

There was no time to set up the fluid head tripod and consider with care every shot. Often, I simply hoisted the JVC on to my shoulder, and went into close-up as soon as possible. If I grew tired, I would pass the camera to Brenda or Claire, knowing that sooner or later it would return to me. (I remember at one point drinking hot sweet tea from an enamel mug and eating a hunk of dry brown bread, and conscious of nothing more than the pleasantly icy touch of my shirt drying on my back.) That afternoon, in the vain hope that the Panasonic's colour qualities might just, by some freak of fate, prove in the end to be compatible with the JVC's, I sent Claire off with the small camera to do the outside shoots we could not cover: cutaways of the front of the factory; the dyeing of the cloth; the drawing of the patterns in the wet cowdung paste as it was spread across a courtyard floor.

Using lights and the thumping Tiakeni generator, we worked into the night, recording Andries at his drill-press in the workshop, while Sipiwe on the Panasonic recorded us.

As early as possible the next day we pushed on, but lunchtime brought the inevitable hiatus.

"I haven't got what I wanted," I fretted aloud as I climbed into the driver's seat of the kombi.

Nobody else said a word. We were all tired.

I turned the key in the ignition, and the engine shuddered as it swung over and caught.

## Post-production

We got back to the campus at about eight that night. The first thing I did was to view some of the tapes. The back-focus problem was magnified on the bigger screen of the monitor in my office.

There was no point in watching for long. I switched off the machine and sat back to reflect. If in any way I had unconsciously subverted the whole shoot (and I wasn't sure that I had), then it could only have been because I felt that it had been imposed on me, dropped into my lap with a coolly imperious air and the silent command: "Do it."

The next day, when I saw Greg and Matthys together in the lecture room outside my office, I invited them in to discuss the shoot.

It was very tense. Greg and I faced one another across the table. Matthys looked enormously uncomfortable. For a minute or two, we discussed things in general, and then, at last, Greg and I clashed. My temper flashed so high, it was ridiculous. I slammed the desk-top with my fist and demanded more autonomy. The confrontation only intensified antagonism, however. After the two of them had left, fatigue and a strong sense of futility overcame me. I dropped the videotapes in an untidy stack on the floor beside my bookcase, as though that was that.

Later in the week, however, Greg and I had to report to the Tiakeni documentary to Dr van Zyl. My spell of insomnia had not yet lifted: I had not slept since the Saturday, five days and four nights before. I must have looked like the walking dead. My perceptions were almost hyper-acute.

The discussion that followed was bitter and acrimonious. Greg turned on me. "You are the professional," he said. "Where was your script?"

It was impossible to answer all the accusations that were fired at me. In any case, I was inarticulate, as I often am when called upon to deliver an explanation. But also, I was trapped by a circular argument: I was responsible for the production so, whether the production went right or wrong, I was responsible for the production.

The underlying imputation of incompetence did not worry me, really. I knew I was capable of pulling through a standard documentary without too much difficulty. What I really wished I could understand was that obscure sense of certainty that I had felt, that intuitive condemnation of professionalist production methods that had come to me on site at the Mashemse homestead, that perception of incongruity, of one-sidedness. It would take me a long time to gain any clarity on that issue, however, and my efforts at the meeting sounded, even to my own ears, unintelligible.

I repeated a previous offer to Greg to take part in the practical TV teaching, though. I even went so far as to offer him the directorship of the next major television project. At that, Greg gulped and looked astonished. Dr van Zyl must have thought that I was trying to get out of directing myself, because he leaned forward and rapped out:

"You are the television person. You must direct."

In the end, I emerged from that meeting feeling personally damaged in a way that seemed to point to eventual estrangement from the department, rather than to any promise of integration into it.

In my office, over the next few weeks, I scratched up in chalk on the blackboard some random but recurring thoughts, that ultimately became the first tentative steps towards this essay. Aphorisms. Axioms.

'Watch it. It is not only the petty bourgeois value of professionalism that dominates television production, but the petty personal struggles that infect it . . . And the most difficult thing of all is to know how much you are yourself to blame.'

Unlike the relations of production, personal relations do not yield to precise systematic exposition. Yet micro-level conflicts — affinities, too — can have make-or-break power over any production, though they leave the broader structures unaffected. The problem, therefore, is how to indicate the complexity of the personal in all its specificity, how to convey the play of relations within a situation in all its concreteness, in a theory of production. Here — as existentialist philosophers once did in trying to present the centrality of their thought to human experience — I have used the codes of the travelogue, personal reminiscence, even the novel. Although such codes are undoubtedly in the end inadequate to reality, too, for the internal coherence necessary to them as narrative form does not entail a corresponding order discernible in the world at all, still, these codes are perhaps not altogether inappropriate, either. At least, they imply a dimension to the argument which can only be fully encountered at the level of interactive human experience, and not in the realm of pure systematic theory.

Blocking them out one at a time in capital letters on the chalkboard, I sloganised my ideas as directives, except if they turned into questions:

**SAVE YOURSELF TROUBLE. DO YOUR RESEARCH THOROUGHLY.  
DON'T BUDGE WITHOUT A WRITTEN SCRIPT FROM A CLIENT.  
DON'T NEGLECT THE RECCE. IT CAN GIVE YOU VALUABLE EARLY  
INFORMATION.**

**USE ONLY A CAMERA YOU KNOW.** (You haven't got a good camera? Then get one, and get to know it. Without becoming an electronics whizzkid, be able to rectify its smaller troubles and tummyaches.)

**KEEP OPEN AT ALL TIMES THE LINES OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN  
YOURSELF AND OTHERS INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT. TV IS ABOUT  
PEOPLE.** (Is it? Then how come I know so much better the behind-camera contributors — Rob and Anne and Greg and Matthys, Sipiwe and my students — than the people the documentary is supposed to be about, the Tiakeni workers, whom I do not really know at all?)"

In the meantime, during their practical classes, the third-year students and I carefully viewed every inch of the footage shot on all fourteen of the worktapes. Interestingly enough, after the first few moments of watching the screen, it was possible to accommodate the soft focus in mid- and long-shot without noticeable displeasure — perhaps because there is a common precedent in the bad video copies of movies we all occasionally see.

"I think we could edit something together out of that! It's not so bad," said Giulio Biccari in the end, and the others agreed. But I had already resolved to reshoot the documentary, if I could.

## enclitic 15/16

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# The Second Attempt

## Preproduction

I arranged with Central Television Service for the TK-76, the three-tube ENG camera I myself knew best and had used on outside shoots when I had worked there. Also, the CTVS producer whose work I held in the highest regard, an American graduate in television production called Joan Wagenseill, was set to accompany me. We were to take the CTVS kombi, which was in perfect trim.

I saw Dr van Zyl, and outlined my plans for the reshoot. "I didn't think it would be so simple!" he remarked, and wished me luck.

Then there were some bad moments with Professor Charlton of the Screening Committee, as I have already described, but in the end the project was passed. I received a phone call from Joan however,

"Listen," she said, "I've got cold feet about the political thing. Kirsten's coming with you."

## Production

Kirsten Lampbrecht was an ex-Rhodesian, inflamed by the loss of the war, in which he had fought for seven years. "Houties?" he said "I hate them. In the war, if they gave themselves up, we would just take them into the bush and shoot them. Once. Right here, in the head. Pow!"

Surprisingly enough, he got on very well with Rob and Anne, who seemed to like his warmth, directness and cheerfulness.

"Rob and Anne are great people," he told me more than once, and quite genuinely.

He regarded them as sacrificing themselves for the factory which, he was certain, would fall apart as soon as they withdrew — "Just like Rhodesia".

He was not in any way warm-hearted and open towards the Tiakeni workers however. He did not seem to see them at all, except as objects. Once, when Anne was calling to one of the women who did not seem to have heard her, he growled: "Hey! Don't you listen to the madam?"

Anne blanched. "Don't call me the 'madam'!" she insisted, with a bright but awkward smile. But Kirsten sometimes forgot.

"Just go and tell the madam we need her here."

My own problems with Kirsten were somewhat different.

Before joining the CTVS staff, he had worked for SABC-TV as a cameraman on outside broadcasts. Rugby, cricket, tennis. The odd news spot. An on-location feature series. OB camerawork in an actual-time relay tends to look excitingly rough and ready, but on analysis betrays itself as functioning invariably within the safest possible limits: long shot, midshot, close-up; long shot, midshot, close-up. Essentially, what is required of an OB cameraman is the

skill and the nerve to locate action rapidly and unerringly, to hold it at the centre of the screen, and then to follow it, zooming in to a close-up or out to long shot at the director's command. Perhaps, therefore, the slower and more painstaking process of discontinuous shooting with a single camera, the careful consideration given, for instance, to the formulation and framing of each separate shot, were new to Kirsten, or otherwise foreign to his temperament. He needed to keep active. But I certainly had to instruct him in some of the simplest fundamentals of cinematic shooting — like the importance of changing angle and image-size each time the camera was stopped during the shooting of action that was to be broken down into related shots — which he sometimes ignored, and which would have landed me with impossible complications in the editing, had I not had material from the first shoot to fall back on.

Not that his ideas weren't sometimes good. The long slow pan and tilt down from the huts on the distant hillside to the factory in the foreground during the narration on the beginning of Tiakeni up to that present time, was all his. And his staunch technical knowledge proved useful too. When, at the commencement of our very first shoot, we discovered that the TK's back-focus was out, too, he spent half an hour meticulously resetting it, after which it focused perfectly. There was nothing, however, that Kirsten (or anyone else, I subsequently discovered) could have done about the fact that the camera's green tube began malfunctioning, making the whole image murky, smeared and noisy, and, of course, greenish.

It was simply that the camera, after eight years of hard use, and having been in a seriously tricky and cantankerous condition for the past few months, had now slipped into its final decline. After the Tiakeni shoot, CTVS engineers made a concerted attempt to fix it, but it never went out on a shoot again, and was finally scrapped.

My defeat, too, was final. It was almost uncanny, like fate. It was as though I had put up a massive struggle to relaunch the documentary only so that the nightmare of faulty technology of the first shoot should be succeeded by the nightmare of faulty technology of the second.

I became a totally pragmatic director, an organised head operating at a purely functional level, as I had been as an educational TV producer. Social and aesthetic considerations ceased to exist, and I applied rule-of-thumb but reliable practices, practices I knew could be counted upon never to fail, e.g. matching the visuals to the key statements in the script. In the early evening, we would review the material recorded that day and then, after supper, I would go over the next part of the script that Rob had written, and break it down into a shooting script. Rob was keeping exactly one pace ahead of us each day with the script. As soon as we had shot one section, another would be ready. He did this so predictably that when at four o'clock in the afternoon on our last day of shooting, he handed me a full new page, I was dismayed. The page was all about the committees vital to the administration of the co-op and could definitely not be left out. All I could do was seat the people outside the factory in the large circle that they used for a



general assembly, and let Kirsten do a very lengthy pan around while one of the workers read the commentary on to the soundtrack.

Rob held strongly to his original idea that the people must appear to be presenting themselves and their opinions fluently and authoritatively to camera, and wrote therefore in a simple and clear style that the people might themselves have used — except that the ideas were possibly too condensed and clear, when they would probably have been expressed more irregularly, repetitively and elliptically in normal conversation. With the written script in hand, I had then to contrive ways of getting the people to read or repeat it while facing the camera. It was this practice more than any other which made me realise that I was compromising the ethical codes of documentary-making for the sake of ideology. In one of the earliest scenes, for instance, where I, microphone in hand, approach Martha, as a representative of the workers' co-operative, and ask her to tell us about Tiakeni, she turns up her face and recounts: "Our name, Tiakeni, which in Tsonga means 'Build yourself up', tells the history of the co-op and it talks about what we would like in the future from our work here." But she has turned up her face only in order to read the words of the script as cast by an overhead projector on to a screen behind Kirsten. Like everyone else, Martha found it difficult to read or remember at the same time as presenting a natural assertiveness. The words were in English, anyway, and she was being called upon to act as though she were not acting — which she simply could not do. Her presentation became at once too didactic and declamatory. Despite repeated attempts, there was in the end no way she could relax and speak the words with the casual directness and strength the occasion demanded.

That evening, when Rob saw take after take of Martha in close-up, the strain of concentration showing in every line of her face, he was irritated and disappointed. Although I explained that in the editing I would certainly cut away from her as soon as possible and begin to use my footage on the women at work, Rob remained dubious. Perhaps it was the essential artificiality and unconvincingness of Martha's presentation, not only in her face but in her voice, that seemed unlikely to be overcome. To me, it appeared that the internal contradiction of the method had destroyed it.

The second attempt at shooting the Tiakeni documentary was characterised, therefore, by tight attention to the script, together with an unremitting determination to press on and complete the product, despite the demoralising failure of the camera to function properly.

With the entire shoot recorded neatly on to only six worktapes — less than half the number thrown up by the first attempt — Kirsten and I left Tiakeni feeling pretty pleased with ourselves. We had been 'quite professional'.

## Postproduction

The completed videotape on the Tiakeni textiles co-operative is called *Nkonyama Hi Tinwana Tingonyama. A Lion Is Other Lions: We Can Achieve Nothing Alone*. The tape runs for 30 minutes, with sound on both channels. The majority of the sequences are coded in colour. A few are in black and white. The transition between the two chrominance modes can, however, cause technological difficulties. Unless a most sophisticated videocassette recorder is used for the replay, the crossover from monochrome to colour (though never the other way round) can throw the colour-lock out of joint: the TV screen may for some seconds or even a full minute or more become divided into a blue side and a yellow, for instance. Considering the importance of the point being made by the change both of key and of content between black-and-white and colour, this mechanical problem can confuse the issue of the significance of contrasted colour modes for the viewer. It is therefore advisable in attempting a reply to use only the best machine available.

Visual quality, despite an attempt in the editing to enhance colour reproduction and clarity of image by adjusting the exposure levels during a routing through the time base controller, remains more or less poor. Obviously, the problem had its source in the behaviour of the camera during the shoot, and is not in any way attributable to the actual physical qualities of the tape (a National NV-P26) itself — yet there is a moment during one of the sequences, a close-up shot of blue printing ink being mixed in a bucket, when a blemish on the mastertape and nothing else precipitates a flash and a break-up of the image, followed by a stretch of colour loss and image instability. Isolated as it is, the problem is not easily overlooked, and can adversely affect the viewer's grasp of what has been included narratively in the tape to convey a sense of the TV crew's struggle to get the equipment functioning properly, and what exactly are real but unfortunate snags and hassles with the tape he is watching. Uncertainty as to what constitutes intentional communication and what merely 'noise', can lead to a disengagement of attention, rather than the heightened critical awareness that the dialectical interplay of black-and-white and colour is meant to provide.

As for audio quality, the sound recorded on location is generally at least passable, and the tape suffers only from the exigencies of environmental sound-fluctuation to be expected in such documentary production. At times, however, the outbursts of wild sound are destructive of entire sequences, as in the important interview with Rob Collins on his role in Tiakeni shot outside the factory in the middle of a group of workers during morning tea. Rob's voice, level and conversational and quiet, is so frequently drowned out by the teatime racket — tin mugs clattering, fowls being shooed away, people laughing uproariously or talking loudly in their own tongue — that the thread of the interview becomes lost, and again, confusion results.

In the long run undoubtedly even more damaging to the sense to be made from the documentary, is the outcome of the basic directorial decision to make

up replies and explanations to be given in English by Venda- and Tsonga-speaking people addressing the camera. The indigenous accents are sometimes so broad and strong, and the delivery so wooden, that the viewer is hardpressed always to understand. The problem is compounded by the inevitable muffling of the voice that results from generational loss in the editing process. So, the viewer, instead of being able to exercise a TV-viewer's privilege and allow himself any depth of involvement he pleases in the programme he is watching, is placed in the uncomfortable position of straining to understand, constantly on the verge of finding something impenetrably obscure to the ear. Only the most highly motivated — perhaps politically committed — viewer will remain attentive throughout.

Transitional devices in the Tiakeni videotape are restricted to simple cutting, because of the limitations of the editing suites at Central Television Service where, across three months of night and weekend work, the mastertape was finally put together.

To begin with, there were twenty worktapes. Until a solid familiarity with all the recorded material had been satisfactorily attained, these tapes were submitted to repeated viewings. Then the key tapes were selected and viewed again, the counter readings of different takes noted down, and a profile sketch of the possibilities available drawn up roughly on paper. This made the actual work at the editing suites quicker, more precise and efficient.

Cinematically, one of the most successful sequences is the dyeing of the cloth. The great primitive barrel-like contraption over which the cloth is draped as it is wound and dragged through the deep-saffron waters of the enamel bath, is shot in high angle against the sky, and as the handle is turned and the wooden-slat wheels spin, and the orange-and-black cloth is spread out and the light strikes through it, the women's voices singing rise on the soundtrack as though in support of the work, imbuing it with an energy that is at once vital, earthy and heroic.

The worst sequence, on the other hand, is certainly that interminable pan around the people seated in a circle on the grass outside the factory in the late afternoon, while the voice-over explains monotonously the value of the committees to the running of the co-op.

The roll-up of printed words in the very first take establishes explicitly that the documentary was conceived as a student project — thus allowing a wide margin of tolerance for technical mishaps! But the black-and-white footage also becomes a frame, a bracketing structure, which to some extent objectifies the documentary as product, as something constructed, put together. There is no way at all in the tape of escaping the knowledge that there was once this group of young people who made the programme we are watching. Which personalises the programme, too, making it less public and authoritative, less like TV.

The student footage was actually patched together from the two tapes of fairly wild shooting on the Panasonic. The only criterion I applied to the question of

whether a particular image and particular words — from different circumstances, perhaps even from different tapes — should be connected together or not was whether they would then cohere and contribute towards a sequence. During the opening scene of the students unpacking and setting up the equipment in the factory, for instance, there is a shot of someone (Giulio Biccari) handling the portable monitor, and saying strongly (Matthys's voice, inadvertently recorded while he and Greg were waiting outside for the microbus to arrive): "Hey, wait, I haven't got a picture here, man!" Similarly, later in the same sequence, the clear voice calling, "Yes! I'm getting a picture," is Lee Harvey's, but the image we are concentrating on is that of Claire Swartzberg, turning towards the factory table with the camera in position on her shoulder — followed immediately by the first cut to colour, and the women entering at the far end of the factory with the long roll of cloth to lay out along the table.

In the end, however, the most important element to emerge from the Tiakeni documentary is contained in the dialectic of black-and-white against colour, in the inclusion of the process as well as the product in the programme being viewed — which challenges the viewer not to rest with either but to think of the ways in which they are interrelated. Not only, as a semiotician would, of all the paradigmatic and syntagmatic choices that might have gone into the production, but also of the hazards of chance and the mountains of planning, the struggle with equipment and the co-operation of otherwise-unrelated people in working together towards achieving the production — in short, of cinema production as material, cultural action, again.

The Tiakeni documentary also formally subverts the naïve realist's window-on-the-world notion of the nature of documentary, by being awkward and rough and unequal in quality, and blatant about the act of shooting it — whereas the naïve realist would suppress not only the processes of production but also all else that might get in the way of the illusion of direct access to reality by cinematic means. Jump cuts instead of invisible cutting, for instance.

The Tiakeni documentary has been shown in France, at a conference on development in the Third World and, Rob tells me, was well received. Only, some people would have liked more of the song at the end.

At the end, it is late in the afternoon and the workers move away across the veld, going home, and one woman's voice rises above them in a yearning hymn:

*If you believe and I believe,  
Then Africa will be saved,  
And Africa will be saved . . .*

There are a few more stanzas repeating the same simple words. The workers vanish. On the screen, a fade down to darkness. The voice vanishes.

I, too, have seen people sitting pensively at the end of that song — after a long documentary with all the problems that I have outlined above. And that's when I think that the message has been perceived and that the attempt is worth it.

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- 25 Tyrell, R. 1972 *The Work of the Television Journalist*. Focal Press, London, p57
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- 27 The reversal of standards is not simply a struggle on the plane of aesthetics, of popular art against highbrow autonomous art, but symptomatic of a far deeper dislocation of values. Sekula, *ibid*, writing specifically of American television, has put the point cogently: "with the triumph of exchange value over use value, all meanings, all lies, become possible".
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- 34 See Paulo Freire, 1970: *Cultural Action for Freedom*. Harvard Educational Review, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
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