

there is no adequate place for exposure of the finished product: cinemas are not keen to include such offerings in their supporting programmes, and T V keeps an iron fist on all that it beams out to a happy nation.

And so, a uniquely dynamic art form flounders through the lack of dynamism in ideas and attitudes surrounding it. Only once we, as a nation, relax rigid preconceived attitudes and engage in an open and genuine interchange of ideas at all levels, can we hope to produce the atmosphere in which the artistic creativity Tomaselli envisages is encouraged and flourishes.

If Tomaselli's book in any way foments more open debate within film circles, its appearance is to be welcomed. However, at times its main thrust is obscured by its fairly amorphous structure and Tomaselli's propensity to side track main issues, especially in the case of one or two overdone wishful comparisons (to the French New Wave and Jean Vigo in particular).

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### Notes

Keyan Tomaselli - The S A Film Industry. Published by African Studies Institute. University of Witwatersrand, Braamfontein, Johannesburg. R2,75 (including tax). First edition out of print. Second edition is scheduled to appear in September 1980.

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## REPLY TO R.W. HARVEY

Harriet Gavshon

Harvey offers some valuable criticism of Tomaselli's book, The S A Film Industry (Critical Arts, March 1980, vol. 1, no. 1). His comments on the subsidy system, for example, are especially useful as it is obvious that the state does not have a neutral interest in subsidising films. Much of his criticism, however, is marred by academic obscurity. This allows him to reach such vague conclusions as:  
"It is from a consciousness of ideology, from it having been made visible again, that one may be able to estimate the direction to challenge, and determine the strength needed to be successful." (p.59)

In addition even within the brevity of the critique, Harvey's analysis is not always consistent. He states that "... S A commercial film ... is the product of long established industrial structures" (p.58) - a static view of artistic production which takes no account of the dynamism that emerges from the specificity of artistic production. Later he discusses its ideological function but there seems to be little connection between the two points. What Harvey should be discussing is the specificity of the production of an ideological commodity and as such is subject to different forces which must be taken into account.

Moreover, film production is not merely "the product of defined social relations" but a force in defining those relations.

Harvey also suffers from some "critical misunderstandings". He seems to be inventing a contradiction in Tomaselli which does not exist. No one would

suggest that free enterprise excludes "intense structuration and management", and he is unjustified in saying "it is thoroughly misleading to conceptualise commodity production in conditions of free enterprise" (p.57) (Is this not what Marx was doing in *Kapital*?) and it renders his argument meaningless.

That Tomaselli did not examine the social formation in detail is indeed a serious omission. The structure of the book however shows that he does not separate cultural production from economic structure as Harvey suggests. By examining the various stages of production within the industry he seems to be implying that a film is not only defended by powerful ideological interests but is modified by the production process itself. Furthermore although Harvey correctly points out that Tomaselli's ideological stance is often confused, he never did imply that films were "ideology-free".

Of course all films embody social relations but some films despite that can also be classified as "art". The films of Ross Devenish, although limited, are relatively critical and could even be called a "tool for the investigation of reality". They are of course by no means "ideology-free" but they are in Tomaselli's terms - "art". They are a view of reality mediated through the eyes of an artist (whose vision is determined by that reality) and exists as art despite embodying social relations. For the film-maker to merely submit to the realisation of the contradictions inherent in cultural production would be regrettable and ultimately sterile.

It is more films like those of Devenish that seem to be Tomaselli's "idle dream". The references to the French New Wave can only be seen as historical although South Africa shares the feature with post War France of being glutted with American exports and local imitations. The New Wave however did manage to forge an indigenous "self-critical" cinema within the constraints of cultural production.

Tomaselli should have called his book "The South African White Film Industry" as under the present conditions he could not have written about any other. There is no "Black Film Industry" other than the "moving-photo-novella-factory" which are written, directed and financed by white production houses. This industry does warrant examination, a fact recognised by Tomaselli who is at present researching it.

Perhaps the most important parameter in which to judge the book is that which Tomaselli set himself. Harvey failed to take cognisance of the readership for which it was intended. Undeniably "reformist" and by no means "the definitive political economy of the South African (white) film industry" it was written mainly for the "industry or the informed film-goer". It is therefore a popular book and its merit is its accessibility. It should be seen as successful therefore if it stimulates change within the industry itself or alternatively provides raw material for a more rigorous academic study.

#### Note

1. Exception is Gibson Kente's How Long which was disrupted by the police during production and has never been seen commercially.

The S A Film Industry. 1979. Published by the African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand, 1st Edition.