The analogy to literature study is clear: our pupils are exposed to a modicum
of literary theory, they study some of the Great Works of Literature, and do
a little writing of their own, not in order to become Great Writers, but so
that they might begin to recognise and appreciate greatness in literature,
and in the immediate world around them.

The Achievement of the Conference

The organisers are to be congratulated on having brought together some of the
major film-teaching institutions in the country. Major areas of difficulty
and disagreement have been identified. This experience will undoubtedly form
the basis of future Festivals at which answers will be found to the questions
raised at this first, and very significant conference.   •

Reference

1. Grove, J. 1980: "Film and the Short Story - A Medium for Teaching English.
    MA. Thesis, University of Witwatersrand

View Two : Conflicting Paradigms and Ideologies

Keyan G. Tomaselli and Graham Hayman

The purpose of the Festival was to provide student directors and video/film
makers with a platform to exhibit their work and a chance to assess it against
a critical and informed audience. It was hoped that the Festival, while not
being able to affect the conservative direction of the South African film
and television industries, would at least be able to intercept and encourage
the growing intellectual debate on the media, a phenomenon which has only
recently begun with the introduction of broadcast television in 1976 and the
consequent introduction of film and television courses at local universities,
and media studies (mainly short films) at school level.

The films and video productions shown did not fall into the well-known
categories or genres of the orthodox broadcasting and film industries. They
tried instead to make connections between things, events and processes which
are usually kept separate. Most were made in an atmosphere of relative
freedom: freedom from the imperative of efficiency at the expense of tontent
demanded by commercial television stations; freedom from the chains of profit
maximization; and freedom from the cliche" which governs the entertainment
industry - "give the public what it wants".

The Festival began with a public screening of the Australian award winning
film, Breaker Morant (1980), which revolves around an incident which occured

during the Anglo-Boer War in 1903 in South Africa. This was only the third preview screening of the film before it went onto general release two weeks later. Visiting lecturer, Susan Gardner of the University of Queensland, Australia, followed with an in-depth historical and ideological analysis of the film. She argued that, although set in South Africa, it reveals more about the ideology and myths of Australian society than it does about the War itself, or South Africa. Richard Haines, history lecturer and co-contributor to this section discussed how the film had been used in England to teach Anglo-Boer War history (in terms of a School Study Guide put out by the distributors). He showed how reality had been distorted in both history text books and the film in order to meet ideological demands and, in the case of film, cinematic conventions as well.

The daily sessions revolved around the screening of short student films followed by discussion. The screening of the films made by first year students (1980) of the School of Dramatic Art of the University of Witwatersrand (under the supervision of Keyan Tomaselli), which initiated the conference, stimulated an immediate polarization between the way film and video production was taught at the liberal English speaking universities and the Pretoria Technikon, which houses the best equipped film school in the country. This polarization widened during the subsequent deliberations. On a broad level, the differences revolved around four recurring themes: (1) the function of tertiary education in capitalist society; (2) a perceived over-concern with technical expertize in (3) isolation from the relationships which pertain between technique, technology, content and structure; and (4) how these are permeated by ideology.

More specifically, differences revolved around the rejection of cliches and conventional techniques of story-telling by the Wits students who investigated themes and connections rather than developing narratives. Members of the Technikon's film school argued, in contrast, that film involved only the telling of simple stories - like <u>Little Red Riding Hood</u>. "Even the news", observed lecturer Ben Theunissen, "is a story - therefore film should follow the same pattern". Claiming that a strict control over the content and method of student production was necessary, he maintained that a student must learn technique and film grammar before he should be allowed to make a film.

While disagreeing on every other point made by the Technikon, Greg Garden (Wits) in his address, "Film and TV Production Skills as Environmental Response Mechanisms", did agree that the flouting of continuity and conventions in film making could only be eliminated through a structured control exerted by the lecturer over the content and method of production employed by students. To the left of this view stood John Hill (University of Cape Town), whose discussion on "The Aims, Operations and Problems of the Young Film-makers Workshop" involving school children, pointed out (reluctantly) that a degree of control was necessary to ensure that projects were completed. He saw such supervision as mainly of an administrative nature rather than strictures on content and structure.

Rhodes University's Keyan Tomaselli and Graham Hayman took a much more radical stance and warned of the ideological implications of lecturer imposition and the use of convention and established film grammar for their own sake. Drawing on experience fostered by ethnographic film makers, and particularly the ideas of Sol Worth, they pointed out how a rigid teaching approach to film and TV production could alienate the student's potential and be coopted by the state to reproduce the status quo in South Africa. Tomaselli and Hayman argued that students should be encouraged rather to use film and video

to strip away the accepted way of seeing things that the orthodox use of the media present so repetitively and insidiously. Countering Garden's argument that some of the Wits films made under Tomaselli's supervision lacked sharp focus in places and that continuity was loose in one of the films, Hayman pointed out that focus and continuity were themselves conventions which needed to be questioned. He offered an example of how Radio Bantu, a film made by the South African Department of Information, used hard focus/soft focus to entrench perceptions of the dominant ideological hierarchy in South Africa. In this film, whites are always shown in sharp dominant focus while blacks move 'rhythmically' in the background blur. Such techniques or continuities, he argued, are designed to serve the interests of capital and perpetuate an image of the prevailing class structure.

This discussion highlighted deep differences between the various delegates in their awareness of ideology. It was clear that some were unconscious of the role of ideology in the mass media, and of the need to counteract such influences. Where the Technikon desired to groom diploma graduates for "a job", the universities generally aimed to equip their graduates with a theoretical background to enable them to question their expected roles in the media industry. Because of the traditional ideological position of the universities, which look askance at the over-emphasis on technical skills and courses (even today practical courses and teachers coordinate *very* uneasily in Arts Faculties), time and facilities for teaching of technique are limited. At such a conference then, each of the polarized approaches to film/video production has a strong point of criticism which neutralizes the other's strengths; the technically proficient scorn the theoretically conscious productions which lack technical 'polish', and the university producers criticise the items which are made in the conventional mould.

This division at the level of education reproduces the later management/worker split in the industry, and must be seen as a hinderance to innovation in the South African film/TV industry. It is the first step in the internalization of orthodox conventions and work roles, which are then seen together as part of 'professional' practice, adherence to which guarantees progress and higher wages in the industry. Both producers (usually university graduates) and technicians then find themselves in mutually exclusive fields of work. A more common approach between producers (or directors) and technicians, down to the level of education, would reveal the job classifications created and maintained by management for what they are; the best conditions for the accumulation of capital, because the products made by the specialists are then in line with the dominant ideology in the industry and the nation. This avenue of possible change was not explored overtly at the conference, but hopefully, further such conferences will help to breakdown this watertight concept of roles and techniques.

Those options which were suggested ranged from challenging the status quo from an external base on the one hand, to working within the capitalist system from the inside, on the other. While the former was revolutionary in character, requiring alternative production facilities, finance and distribution networks (mainly universities, film festivals etc), the mnre liberal-humanist approach outlined by Dr John van Zyl in his perceptive paper, "Beyond Graduation: Jobs for Whom?" argued for working within the burgeoning closed circuit networks and commercial educational technology departments of large companies. Programmes of relevance here would be, for example, those made made by the Wits School of Dramatic Art on child-minding and health care in places like Soweto. Such programmes, termed "developmental media" by van Zyl

wer o HppmPd to provide immediate benefits for individuals caught up in the
h h realities imposed on them by apartheid. Van Zyl was quite clear as
..ar t i t o V lack of commitment to the established commercial industry,
h^ticiilarlv the state controlled South African Broadcasting Television
we re (SABC-TV) . Of a more theoretical nature was Sally Ann Benn's (Wits)
discussion on "Broadcasting Media and the Community". Arguing within
cassical development theory, she called for a new media structure to serve
thf community on a much broader and equitable basis than was presently being
HnnP bTthe SABC and other state departments. Her reformist zeal, however,
was tempered by her acknowledgement that this "if only" argument had little
chance of being enacted in reality.

Tn rfirpct contrast to the reformist position proffered by van Zyl and Benn,
l* the radical contribution of Harriet Gavshon, a Wits School of Dramatic
Art graduate now working in the film industry. In an address entitled,
"Uncovering Ideology in Cinema aimed at Black Audiences", she outlined how
the dominant ideology coopts the film industry in not unsubtle ways to
reproduce the existing relations of production.

The Festival ended with the screening of Gavshon's video production, <u>Women</u>
in Process (1980), which examines issues of male exploitation of women
Through the actual experiences of three actresses who have rejected their
tvnecasting in stage bedroom farces. This programme, which observes and
records' rather than directs, has since been screened at the 1981 Cape Town
International Film Festival and the Aarhus University Film Festival,
"Projecting Women" held in November 1981.

n+hpr naDers offered included a discussion of SABC radio and TV soap operas.
"Trauma bv Installment" by Leandra Elion (Wits) marks the first time that
this tvpe of programme has been the subject of a semiotic analysis. Remain-
ina productions screened included a number from Rhodes University (both
Drama and Journalism Departments), Durban-Westville and the Pretoria Technikon.
(The latter seemed to bear little relation to the Technikon's philosophy
stated earlier).

Whether the Festival was successful or not is hard to ascertain. In ideo-
logical terms, it identified and stimulated a polarization between those
adhering to the dominant ideology of conventional film/video making, who
followed the hallowed path of first teaching technique as if this had no
ideological connotations, and hoping that content and structure would follow.
At the other end of the pole were those who took a more holistic view, one
which was designed to exploit and liberate the specific qualities of the
medium properties which have been hidden under the weight of convention,
linear as opposed to lateral thinking, and bourgeois notions of aesthetics.
It was, however, clear that these more radical notions were not appreciated
bv many of the lecturers present and a number expressed concern that
analysis of content should be taken beyond the film itself. "A film stood
on its own was the counter argument[1] - it was unnecessary to investigate
the social, political or economic influences which brought it about in the
first place .....

Yet despite these ideological differences, a certain degree of groundwork
has been laid from which the development of film and video studies in South
Africa can grow. While ideological differences will remain, at least ideas
previously not articulated <u>between</u> film departments have been aired, and
these might ultimately lead to a reassessment of notions of theory, technique,
content and ideology, and how these all interact with the political economy
to support it, criticise it or challenge it.