

## Conference Report:

### Class, Race or Culture: Who is the Enemy?

Graham Hayman

What follows is a revised version of an impromptu address delivered during the summing up session held on the final day of the week long conference. The writer attended approximately 70% of the events and missed the discussions on poetry and theatre since he was involved with his colleague, Keyan Tomaselli, in conducting workshops on the film and video component.

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This report is divided into 18 different thematic points for such was the scope of the conference that it is necessary to draw out the various positions - both practical and theoretical - before looking at the conference as a whole.

1. The thrust of the conference was misdirected as evidenced in several points of organization: (a) each medium was dealt with separately, both in terms of subject and time. No session of an integrated nature were offered; (b) the delegates and speakers constituted a distorted sample in terms of contributors to the international debate on social development: no anthropologists, radical economists or political scientists. At the other end of the spectrum, there were no traditional artists, poets, praise singers or musicians present. Most of the speakers and delegates were drawn from the arena of individual *rather than collective action*.

2. This asymmetrical representation of delegate interests was reflected in the content and structure of the papers presented. While there was much valuable material on *personal* work-styles and vision, there was a marked lack of awareness on how the different media relate to each other, how these in turn are related to modern mass communication systems, or how the basic mechanics of communication work, both in the urban centres and rural areas. Most of the visual artists present seem to still be locked into the garret. There was little awareness of how different interpretations can be elicited by the same work (whether it be a play, video, picture, film) depending on context and audience.

3. Deriving from the above, the delegates had little awareness of of the means by which the mass media are able to coopt an artist's work in the service of the hegemonic alliance. One leading photographer was unaware that pictures could be re-presented -- in a newspaper, for example -- in a way that deprived it of its intended meaning.

On the other hand, artists made well-intentioned but uninformed calls to avoid having their work coopted in this way. They expressed a need for access to the expensive high technology of mass media as a means of countering cooption. Such calls revealed the lack of a broad awareness of the institutional context of mass media, of finance and maintenance costs. The experience of other Third World countries has resulted in increased dependency on capital: grants and gifts of equipment and software. This reliance reduces self-sufficiency and independence from the dominant interests which control capital. The result is that the context of the receiver is ignored. Even where training is given by the donor country or sponsoring organization, this education often (and inappropriately) assumes the technical, economic and institutional infrastructure which supports such media in First and Second world countries.

4 In parallel with the general naivety about the mechanics of the mass media, as well as the minority forms represented at the conference, there was also confusion about the concepts of 'community' and 'common culture'. As the symposium progressed, increasing use was made of these terms though with little idea of how this culture was to be brought into being. The two concepts of community and culture were not defined, integrated strategies of resistance not developed nor were the problems of overcoming the existing class divisions and cultural responses dealt with.

5. If structural change is to be effected a comprehensive strategy of resistance must span a wider range of social practices: trade unions, teachers, sports administrators, cultural workers and the like. There would obviously have to be a significant shift away from the limitations of individual artistic vision, art-as-culture and claims of universality for art. Quality was confused with comprehensibility. Where creative works are assumed to offer the means of communication, not enough attention was given to how they become ends through distribution/display/performance where the artist is no longer in contact with his/her audience. Working within his/her chosen medium, the practitioner then assumes that the particular conventions and styles utilised are universal -- as in the assumed 'universal language of pictures' -- without knowing that such pictorial, verbal and musical sign systems are rooted in particular historical conjunctures, traditions and cultural responses.

6 The conference organizers assembled a highly relevant collection of films and videos representing alternative views of South Africa. Little, however, was done to structure the screenings of these productions. At impromptu discussions organised by the delegates themselves, a variety of interpretations became apparent even though most were highly sympathetic to radical points of view. However, much more discussion was needed on the levels of both the general and the particular (eg. techniques).

Some producers, and delegates as well, felt that the artist should work in relative isolation during the creative period. Such was the emphasis on creation that distribution and display/screening appeared more or less as an afterthought.

7 This alienation from the audience -- where at least a 'quality' product was expected -- is the result of capitalist organization where the creator is subject to the marketing decisions of the owners of distribution: galleries, theatres, the press, cinemas, publishers etc. In contrast to this individual artist, the established media -- cinema, TV, advertising etc -- are clear who their consuming audience is. At the touch of a computer button demographic profiles of target markets can be punched out: race, sex, age, income, residence, occupation, tastes, habits of leisure -- even including correlations between choice of toothpaste and kind of car driven. Advertising messages, for example, are structured accordingly and research monitors the performance of the product. Clearly, the artist is going to find it very difficult to counteract the influence of the established media on her own, particularly if he/she has no conception of his/her audience.

8 There was little concern with urban-rural dichotomies. In the urban areas individualization is the norm. People are distracted from their surroundings and their energies are directed into competition (at school, work, sport) rather than cooperation. That the average urban population prefers the mass media to alternative messages was not taken account of.

9. The above issues were raised at the conference. The response from the audience was, however, one of resentment against 'academic ping-pong'. This attitude was particularly in evidence when a particular contribution was being discussed. It was often counter-productive, preventing the refinement of definitions, interpretations, and practical suggestions. Rigorous discussion was substituted with emotional outbursts, often creating division. The anti-academic feeling was understandably based on the way universities operate within the dominant Western system. They classify and communicate knowledge in structured and rigid ways separating out experience into history, geography, economics, the sciences and the arts. Ironically, this division manifested itself at the conference in the way group discussions organised themselves on various subjects. In the absence of cooperative work, common problems were not identified or solved.

10 The traditional artist was conspicuously absent, probably because all traditional figures are suspect in the urban view. The traditional musician, the praise poet, the orator -- who in the homelands are in constant conflict with the authorities -- would have been able to offer valuable advice, working as they do in close contact with their audiences. Many have resisted cooption and have developed a range of resistance rituals. The praise poet, for example, continues to criticise authority to rural audiences. Homeland artists are able to reflect migrant labour experiences and the cultural changes consequent upon them, such as the songs and poetry of Lesotho mineworkers. Such material has also to be brought into a conception of a common culture.

11 To create such a culture, artists must be able to operate

outside the limiting factors of their own particular urban experience. They must similarly be able to move beyond the boundaries of their own mediums and materials. They have to be able to keep in contact with the changing, moving audience that is subject to removals, pass laws, labour legislation and the like. The usual and conventional forms of distribution tend to favour those with secure incomes and comfortable homes. There was no talk of co-operatives of artists, of group as opposed to individual work. The international debate on development takes for granted the necessary involvement of artists with development workers. The orthodox ways of working in the dominant mass media also fall under the aegis of politicians, but in such a way that the artists who work in these areas often feel no constraints because the constraints match their own limited assumptions. These assumptions about the 'right way to do things', the usual forms and materials, the accepted division of labour into specialist areas, tend to support the dominant group because they prevent true experience and innovation, and because these ways of working are the most efficient and profitable for the production of culture.

12 The answer would seem that a variety of forms, materials and working groups and methods are necessary. This variety can only work towards a common culture if the artists are theoretically aware of the political and economic frameworks which tend to coerce them into certain ways of doing things. Where they are not aware of such structural conditions, their work is easily coopted. The state has argued, for example, through the second Steyn Commission, that while a variety of media and messages should be permitted, they should all in essence be saying the same thing (in support of apartheid). It is understandable that artists tend to reject the advice of academics who tend to separate theory from practice, relying instead on their own inspiration and insight. Most academic theory does not operate at the level of detail with which the artist is most concerned. Theory perhaps makes artists feel like puppets or machines subject to rules and prescription. But new theoretical approaches are always being evolved. The work of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, for example, has pioneered methods of research which can reveal detailed questions on cultural topics. Fertile areas of investigation in South Africa would be to account for the similarities and differences between mbaquanga, jazz and reggae, relate these to different audiences and marketing forces, accounting for the political, economic and social forces which generated these musical styles. This kind of theory can help artists understand and use forms which have been written off as devalued. The struggle over meaning is never totally won; even disco can be coopted for conveying alternative messages and assisting cultural resistance.

13. In addition to an awareness of the changing nature of signs, codes and their meanings, must be a concomitant understanding of the changing nature of political systems and movements. It is rare indeed that artists will ever find themselves totally free--whatever the government of the day. Future South African governments will ultimately define the conditions under which artistic work is carried out. As one delegate pointed out, the cultural worker needs to maintain a relative autonomy from the state, that states are repressive by nature. To lose this autonomy would result in the artist being coopted by the hegemonic interests -- whether they be Stalinist or capitalist.

14. The unquestioning acceptance by some of the benefits of alternative political systems -- ranging from socialism through communism and Stalinism -- was paralleled by an equal naivety with regard to their use of metaphors to describe the artistic-political process: the guitar as a weapon, the type-writer as a machine gun, the poem as a bomb etc. These metaphors derive from a very much discredited version of the human communication process and assumes the passive malleability of an audience. Individuals and communities are continually evolving meanings and making sense of their surroundings in terms of structural conditions. The resulting universe of meanings which locate the individuals and the group in terms of particular cultural responses must be taken account of by the artist who wishes to reach them. The artist's work is much more subtle and multidimensional than simple warfare. The word 'war' is contained in the word 'awareness' -- and awareness is the battlefield of the artist. Art works for integration, for political probity: the enemy must be won over, not eliminated. Once the artist wishes to exclude the enemy from his future, to deny the validity of the enemy's experience for the new society, the identity of his self, conditions of existence and personal history, he fails as a cultural worker for he cannot bring about a restructuring of the class system.

15 There is, on the other hand, a space and a need for what the opposition call 'agitprop'. Part of the pattern and tactic of the dominant classes is to exclude the subordinate groups from the mass media. Images of actual conditions are replaced with the dominant ideology's perception of the world. The structure of media messages work to legitimise the status quo through the naturalising of stereotypes. These stereotypes have to be counteracted by the subordinate communities themselves. These more authentic interpretations will necessarily be in opposition to the established stereotypes and will, in all probability, be misread by those adhering to the dominant ideology. The cultural worker should be aware of these semiotic problems and take care to ensure that his/her work does not increase hostility thereby reducing the potential for cooperation between oppositional elements.

16 The most striking division between delegates manifested itself in terms of race and definitions of the enemy. Ironically, most of the black speakers identified racial prejudice as the cause of their predicament. In contrast, were the more logical class-based arguments of the white students who suggested that race was the ideological smokescreen whereby the apartheid class system could be maintained. The relationship between race and class was not solved, while the latter was continuously trivialized in discussion. Part of the reason for this was the hostility towards intellectual analysis as well as class based cultural responses to the South African situation. Blacks tended to make personal statements and to restate their commitment and solidarity in particular ways. Whites tended to express themselves in abstract, universal, depersonalised linear styles of logic and discussion. Blacks live at the sharp end of apartheid and so personal statement is more immediate and relevant, taking precedence over theory and abstraction. Whites, on the other hand, cocooned into their individualised, competitive consumer cells are alienated from their fellow comrades in terms of a common experience. While the 'enemy' remains undefined, it is unlikely that a common strategy of resistance will emerge organically through

spontaneous or even controlled cultural action.

17 Unless follow-up work is done to bind the delegates into integrated strategies for cultural action -- even at the basic level of seeking definitional clarity -- there can be little progress for change. The week's activities will otherwise become but a nostalgic memory for those who attended. Having rejected "academic ping pong" the delegates grooved along to the music of Dollar Brand and Hugh Masekela proclaiming 'how exciting it all was'. The deeper structures that were forming beneath the surface of the event were not identified: particularly, the substitution of a white racism for a black racism. Not surprisingly, those who claimed that they had "guns sticking in their ears and arses", where those who live a cushy existence on the European continent thousands of miles away from the frontline, who exhibit their works in elitist national galleries, including those in South Africa. The frontline is not in galleries, glossy books published by foreign publishers, or overseas; it is in the rural areas of South Africa where collective action rather than individual ego-tripping, is the only means to survival. Yet, these are the exact cultural arenas the conference organization denied. By trivialising 'the arts' to agit-prop, by misrepresenting the enemy as "race" instead of 'class' and by avoiding questions of income derived from sales of works etc., many of the exiled delegates simply refused to come to terms with conditions under which those in the frontline are operating. The frontline also exists in the urban areas, where the battle is against co-option into the new middle classes under the umbrella of total strategy. On the evidence at the conference, the forces of apartheid are winning. It's one thing to divide up the world into 'good' and 'bad' from the outside; it's another to cope with the complexity of reality itself.

18 Some practical suggestions. It is not possible to give every local community access to expensive media technology; the skills and infrastructure are simply not available. However, discussion and analysis in small work groups can help to inoculate people against the one-sided and stereotyped portrayal of reality in the mass media. All that is necessary is a book or two, or even photostatted pages, and the normal access to daily papers, radio and TV. Artists and cultural workers can help to run these groups, skilled as they are in the same elements of words and music, sound, light and colour that these media use. Bibliographies and work materials may be obtained from the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

'I would like to thank Keyan Tomaselli for his critical comments on the Report. Further comment on the conference may be obtained from his article, "Oppositional Film Making in South Africa: Cooption or Resistance? *FUSE: The Cultural Worker's Magazine* (forthcoming) October 1982.

# Up Against Apartheid: The Role and the Plight of the Press in South Africa

Author: Richard Pollak

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Reviewed by Keyan G Tomaseili

The past two years have witnessed a deluge of publications dealing with the press in South Africa. The turn of the decade provided a convenient historical conjuncture which gave birth to three specialist journals investigating a wide range of aspects on the media, two books on the press and a promise of two or three more. This activity was in addition to the previously established *Communicatio* and *The Journalist*, the latter hiccuping into a more regular appearance during 1981.

What have these publications and academic activity accomplished? Very little it seems. *Critical Arts* is only just beginning to shake off a determinist Althusserianism, *Equid Novi* (which seems to have died after three issues) conveniently forgets that reality is far more complex than it seems, while *Communicare's* authors appear to spend inordinate amounts of energy and computer time subjecting their data to statistics and other numerical methods to prove hypotheses which were patently obvious in the first place. No attempt is made to link empirical investigation to a wider theory of causation. Indeed, *explanation* seems not to be important at all. *Communicatio* plods on in a conservative but sound academic manner and outlives *Communications in Africa* which specialised in a positivist empiricism which also forgot to ask why. Other than *Critical Arts*, none of these journals have attempted to develop *theories as explanation*. Most disturbing are the veritable rash of M.A. and Ph.D. theses which consist of nothing more than endless extracts of newspaper editorial joined together with a few lines of evaluation and indignant comment on the political stand taken by the English language press.

The authors of books, however, have fared a little better. Ironically, few of the better analyses have been written by resident South Africans. Apart from an over-abundance of the reminiscences of retired editors and journalists, and National Party flag-waving propaganda purporting to be historical analyses, there are few academically rigorous studies which deserve mention. The most well known is Elaine Potter's *The Press as Opposition*, published by Chatto and Windus in 1975. Of a much more specialised nature is Belinda Bozzoli's *The Political Nature of a Ruling Class*<sup>1</sup>, which derives its information from an exhaustive study of mining, finance and commercial journals between 1890 and 1933. Other recent additions include *Joernalistiek Vandag* which is nothing more than a "How to ..." manual which encodes all the assumptions and clichés of modern journalism<sup>2</sup> (see critique in this issue). Then, of course, there are those studies moulded in the tourist

guide pattern, supplied by Hachten and Barton and others who skim the whole of Africa and come up with neo-colonialist and patronising, but saleable titles, like *Muffled Drums*?

It is against this background that Richard Pollak enters the growth industry emerging around studies of the South African media. On the surface it appears a timely book. It is better written than *Muldergate* published the previous year, and though himself a journalist, it lacks the disjointed scrappyness of *Muldergate*, which consists of one-line paragraphs whose construction bears an uncanny resemblance to the model handed out to cadet journalists who are told to include 'who', 'what', 'when', 'how' and 'why' in every sentence. This formula, of course, obviates the need for a conceptual framework, logical progression or development of an argument.

In contrast, Pollak does have an argument. He states it himself on p. 2: "... more than any powerful force in the country [the English language press] stand almost alone between the Afrikaner government and totalitarian darkness". This quotation just about says it all. Not only does Pollak not understand the ideological role of the English language press, but he has even less understanding of the alliance of classes which make up the hegemonic bloc. It's all so simple: blame it on the Afrikaners. Go further, label that brutally efficient system of economic exploitation called apartheid "political abracadabra" (p. 4) and then make the seemingly contradictory observation that:

the great Catch-22 of South African society is that no matter how determined the government is to stash blacks out of sight, the economic system rests on their cheap labour (p. 4).

Like many of the journals mentioned above, Pollak simply cannot see beyond the surface of things, even when he has isolated the key to deeper structures. He continually makes an important and crucial observation, and then completely misses his own point. Having set up straw men -- Afrikaners -- who have an irrational penchant for bashing the English press, he again throws away other fundamental points. For example:

the role of the English-language press is critical because it provides a highly visible forum for information and ideas inside South Africa and because its reporting has been relayed around the world by a corps of sympathetic foreign correspondents (p. 9).

Precisely. This was one of the main concerns of both Steyn Commissions which intuitively realised that if this exported negative information was cancelled, then everything would come right. Pollak, however, fails to develop this argument, defining the problem as one of democracy in which the economic is neglected. If only positive information is reported the country will be interpreted as being stable, contented and a safe place in which to invest capital, including American capital. Pollak accuses the English press of "beat[ing] around the thorny bush" (p. 9) with regard to "political programs which might jeopardize their patron's financial hegemony", but he conveniently ignores his own backyard which is strewn with multinational corporations which *benefit* from the present situation in South Africa.



Why blame it on Afrikaners alone? Because Mr Pollak, like so many others who have commented on the South African situation -- and which is perpetuated by American newspapers like *The New York Times* and the television networks -- see life in terms of ethnicity and racism. They ignore the deeper structural level so effectively hidden by an ideology which uses racism to mask economic relations.

In his introduction which sweeps through South African history in a most disjointed and simplistic way, he shows his ignorance of the restructuring of capital which has been occurring since the early 1970s. The thousands of pages exploring the complexity and interrelation of South African and overseas capital are reduced to the epithet: "The Afrikaner may control the government, but the English establishment controls the economy" (p. 9).

Against this background, Pollak launches into an analysis of the press since Muldergate -- not "polite sparring" as in the United States where media-government relations are concerned, but a "fury that sometimes borders on mutual hatred" (pp. 1-2).

A discussion of alleged British-Afrikaner antagonism called "The Other Separate Development, British v. Afrikaner" continues Pollak's own brand of abracadabra and ends with a discussion of "Extras" which are designed to appeal to specifically black readers. The contradictions of this situation and the discrimination practiced by English newspaper groups against black reporters is briefly dealt with but the effect of this situation is not explored adequately.

At the end of the second chapter, Pollak again throws away a significant observation:

The sustained attacks of the English-language newspapers unquestionably infuriate the Nationalists. But their traditional commitment to a measure of *white* democracy - and the party's concern for its image abroad - has so far served to keep the country's press relatively free" (pp. 18-19)

This relativity is never defined, but were it, Pollak would find that that 'freedom' hinges not only on actions against the press by the Nationalist government, but also in terms of the prevailing capitalist ethic which demands a class-based society. As in America, the press is free to express the ideas and opinions of the prevailing system of power. Removing apartheid will not nullify the class system, although in Pollak's terms, this modification would constitute a 'democratic' society.

Chapter 3 deals with "Muldergate", offering a brief history and outline. Its most telling statement is found on p. 35:

It is the supreme irony of Muldergate that P.W. Botha, who became the prime minister only because Vorster's handpicked successor, Mulder, was buried under the avalanche of scandal headlines, should devote his first months in office to seeking revenge for the papers' 'gossip-mongering' (p. 35. Taken from *New York Times* 12 December 1978).

Ironical it might be, but politically Botha's action was a master-stroke. Not only was he able to cover up the real extent of the activities of the Department of Information and perhaps of others which were never reported, but by shifting the blame from the government to the English press, he was able to create a suitable climate within which to begin the National Party's final onslaught on negative reporting by the Opposition press. Not only did he push through the Advocate General Bill, but he also marshalled both Steyn Commissions and a host of consolidative legislation and other measures which have significantly eroded press autonomy never before accomplished in such a short period. Pollak misses the point that the government's morality should never be questioned for such is the hegemonic crisis facing South Africa today, that further disclosures of alleged government malpractice could well endanger the safety of the state in its present form. In addition, it would seriously endanger investment confidence in South Africa.

Pollak's discussion of the Press Council, although brief, comes much closer to the kernel of the actual issue. He consistently echoes Irwin Manoim's comments in the preface of this issue and points out that

Although the government's willingness to exclude the NPU (Newspaper Press Union) from the catchall Publications Act ... appears a liberal move, it is just the opposite. Not only can the Nationalists keep threatening a statutory press code and council, but they can always legislate away the Publications Act exemption as well (p. 40).

For once, Pollak is spot on. That is exactly what the government did in 1982. Unless the press agrees to submit itself 'voluntarily' to a body yet to be established, it will find itself under the aegis of the Publications Act.

This more perceptive analysis is followed by the mandatory discussion of "The Legal Labyrinth" which circumscribes the behaviour of the press. It offers no new insights and concludes "That South African reporters function at all in the maze of restrictive laws the Nationalists have produced is remarkable" (p. 56). But like many authors before him, Pollak naively assumes that these laws are designed to shackle the press per se. In fact, they are a secondary consequence of the state's repression of the black subordinate classes. A more thorough reading of Potter would have given him a clue on this issue.

Chapter 6, "Nothing But Anger" describes how the police "hector" journalists, both black and white. An explanation which wilfully avoids a more penetrating analysis is easily ascribed to "madness" (p. 63). Thus are the contradictions under which the press labours resolved.

Pollak's comments on the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) -- "the State Cyclops" -- has identified some significant quotations from *Hansard*. As newscaster Gary Edwards once said, "The SABC thinks that Cabinet Ministers are News":

Ministerial statements on state policy and ministerial explanations on legislative measures shall be regarded as factual news and dealt with as such ...

In this chapter, Pollak exposes his lack of a conceptual framework in two fundamental ways. Despite uncovering important information, he shows up his simplistic interpretation of media and the origination of its content in his sentence, "In general, SABC offers one part news to three parts propaganda" (p. 68). A myriad questions surface immediately: what was the source of his statistical data, how did he calculate them, what does he define as news or propaganda? Where is the division; is there a division? No doubt, like the misleading concept of bias, Pollak can identify it when he reads it. By making this statement he ensconces himself within an incredibly crude libertarian position and offers nothing more than his own suspect personal opinion. Since he offers no clues as to the constitution of propaganda, and given the tone of his argument and implicit comparisons with how the press should be allowed to function in a democracy, he clearly misunderstands the ideological function of the press of legitimating a repressive class system in his own country. In an exhaustive study conducted by his fellow American, Herbert Gans entitled *Deciding What's News*, Gans demolishes the conventional wisdom within which Pollak operates. In the present context, Gans provides a ironically relevant observation:

In many ways, general reporters are like tourists, albeit in their own culture; they seek what is memorable and perceive what clashes with the things they take for granted.<sup>6</sup>

According to the flyleaf of Pollak's book, he came a-visiting "to make a firsthand report of the workings of the press" in South Africa. Being attuned to surface realities he was unable to decipher the hidden agendas and deeper structural conditions. This is not surprising for Gans has doubts about the ability of American journalists to report accurately on America itself:

When I began my fieldwork, I assumed that journalists, especially reporters, knew more about America than anyone else--or at least more than campus-bound sociologists --but this was not the case. Journalists obtain their information about America from their customary sources; from what they themselves read in the paper; and because they have trouble crossing the social barriers that separate them from strangers, from what they learn from peers and personal contact, notably relatives and friends.<sup>7</sup>

As Gans implies of journalists in general, the sources Pollak consulted were extremely limited. Some structural work on the South African media had been done prior to the publication of his book, while structural analyses of the South African political economy are numerous. On the other hand, it does happen that visiting journalists simply do not understand the answers they get or the questions they are asked. One visitor to the Rhodes Dept. of Journalism and Media Studies, who is the European editor for an American newspaper, claimed that the questions he was asked by students suggested their lack of political consciousness. In fact, the students had questioned the very fundamentals of his kind of libertarian journalism and all that it takes for granted. He did not perceive the criticism because he did not understand the questions asked of him.

Ultimately, one needs to ask what Pollak hoped to accomplish by writing this book. The remaining pages deal with the South African government's reaction to "Bad Tidings" in the foreign press and

extensive extracts from the Erasmus Commission which was set up to investigate "Alleged Irregularities in the former Department of Information". This in itself provides nothing new. Neither is the position taken by Pollak innovatory. This question becomes even more important when one considers that *Up Against Apartheid* was published by a university press. If this is the impression that an academic establishment has of our "intensely troubled nation" (flyleaf), it needs to be corrected immediately. Pollak has unwittingly functioned as a tool of American business by perpetuating the myth that all would come right with Afrikaners out of the way. In so doing, he has shifted part of the blame of for apartheid away from American and British capital interests. He refuses to identify the multiple levels which make up the "totalitarian darkness" and which include the English press, foreign capital, American based multinational corporations, and not least, President Reagan's hawkish foreign policy.

Mr Pollak has himself contributed to a part of that "darkness" by legitimating prevailing myths in his book. It is a dangerous book for it tries to isolate the causes of that darkness to ethnicity and madness, rather than brutal economic exploitation from which the West cannot and will not disconnect itself.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

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# KUNAPIPI



Published by Dangaroo Press, Department of English, University of Aarhus, Denmark

Editor: Arnold S de Beer  
Published by Tafelberg,  
Cape Town 1982

Reviewed by Francois Rautenbach

The Chairman of Nasionale Pers and Head of the Dept. of Journalism at Stellenbosch University, Professor P.J. Cillie, who prefaced this book, and who contributed a chapter on "Translation" seems to hit the nail into his own coffin when he writes on p. 108 that he has the impression that too many academic fathers are today giving their children, "not intellectual stones instead of bread but candifloss!"<sup>1</sup>

Even a quick glance through the 186 page volume leaves one with nothing more than the feeling of a series of informal chats, mainly put together from numerous loosely connected thoughts in a manner which is descriptive rather than analytical, and often based on stereotyped generalisations. The contributors include many who have had a lifelong association with the Afrikaans newspaper industry. There are no chapters by Afrikaans journalists serving the English-language newspapers, or the captive black press.

Judging from the style and presentation of the writing, it is doubtful whether any of the contributors to the book viewed their assignments from an academic and scientific perspective, as there is little evidence of in-depth research. They deal, in a vaguely technical way, with subjects such as the general organization of the newspaper (4 chapters), the public debate (P.A. Joubert), Sport (Arrie Joubert), the Arts (by sport writer George Boshoff<sup>2</sup>), financial journalism (S de Swardt), court reporting (J. Viviers), electronic printing (E. Steyn) and the use of photographs (Victor Holloway). The discussion and breakdown of these chapter headings follows the orthodox journalist framework where the world is divided up into little pieces and reported on as if there were no connections between, for example, sport, politics, business and entertainment. As Keyan and Ruth Tomaselli have argued, this fragmentation and reduction of information to 'news' categories shifts reporting away from conditions and processes and fetishises the 'event' instead. Very often the news is further moulded to give it a news angle or ideological theme to fit the above categories or to make it newsworthy.<sup>3</sup>

It is not surprising that the ideological implications of this conventional style of journalism are not explored in the book, for its authors are themselves strongly linked to the dominant ideology of apartheid. They are not, therefore, interested in educating critically minded graduates who might challenge the system, but rather in training students to take up their positions in the Afrikaans newspaper business and to report from a Nationalist perspective without question. Indeed, this book contains little hint of even the small degree of relative autonomy whereby the Afrikaans press has become the internal opposition to the

National Party. The editor manages to avoid the questions of political stance and ideology by the fragmentation mentioned earlier, as well as the apparently technical nature of the book.

The all-encompassing title is misleading and insufficient because no attempt has been made to place Afrikaans or South African journalism in its African, Western or Global context. No mention is made of other kinds of journalism such as 'commitment journalism', 'advocacy journalism', 'investigative journalism', or the ideological pitfalls of libertarian ideals such as 'objectivity', 'fairness' and 'balance' and so forth. Instead, the reader is led to believe that *Joernalistiek Vandag* naturally presents a description of what the press looks like, or should look like. In other words, this book aims at legitimising the way things are. This, in turn, supports the dominant ideology and implies that alternative ways of doing things is suspect.

The way things are to be done is less subtly dealt with by de Beer who writes, "General ruling principles have been laid down ... to which all newspapers and journalists have to adhere" (p. 1). This is apparently a reference to the 'voluntary' controls which have been forced onto the press over the last 30 years. De Beer does not specify these "General ruling principles" but the tenor of the book gives a hint as to what they are.

Quite understandably, therefore, we also do not read about the history of the General Law Amendment Act, promulgated in a *Government Gazette* extraordinary on 27 June 1962, and about which A. Frank May writes in his rather better, though dated book, *Joernalistiek: 'n Kursus vir Beginners'*. Certainly, we are referred to the work of S.A. Strauss and Kelsey Stuart, amongst others, in the chapter entitled "Beware the Long Arm" by Neels Campher, but we are kept uninformed about the alarming increase in the 'minefield of legislation through which the press has to walk through blindfolded'. This is purely a descriptive piece with draws attention to some of the restricting legislation without questioning it or examining in detail its effects on newspaper autonomy or freedom.

Academic obfuscation seems to be the aim of de Beer's discussion on the subject of news presentation. Apparently unaware of the sociological debate on the question of 'values' which occurred in the social sciences during the 1960s and '70s, and additionally ignorant of structural explanations which discredited the ideas of 'objectivity', 'fairness', 'balance' and so on, de Beer simplistically states that "Journalists may never allow their prejudice or stilted values in the form of news stories and articles to present readers with a *drogbeeld* (illusion) of reality" (p. 2). When in doubt, he writes, test the news-worthiness of events against a "model" of their "distance-dimension" and their "intensity dimension". This jargon seems ominously reminiscent of the language used in Steyn Commission II, of which more will be said later.

Characteristic of Professor de Beer's contribution are strange definitions which have little or no theoretical or even semantic basis. For example, he suggests that one "method" which distinguishes "popular" from "quality" publications is that the former "gives its readers what they want (sensationalism), while the other gives them what they *should be getting*".

The term "status quo" is clumsily defined on p. 5 as "a specific event which must happen and which will have an effect on the community where the newspaper is read". Compare this definition with that offered by the *Handwoordeboek van die Afrikaanse Taal*: "n toestand waarin iets verkeer of op n bepaalde tyd verkeer hét".

The "professionalization" of journalist practice seems to be Prof. de Beer's brainchild - at least in this part of the world. This concept, and a number of references to de Beer are dealt with in Steyn Commission II. He was an advisor to one of those submitting evidence to the Commission. There are approving quotations from his paper, "Press Responsibility Based on Professionalism - A Typology of Attributes";<sup>5</sup> here used to define "the fundamental characteristics of a profession". Also referred to by the Commission (and his book) is de Beer's D.Phil thesis, *Die Professionalisering van die Joernalistiek*, submitted to Potchefstroom University in 1980. Professor de Beer's ideas have obviously had some considerable impact on the thinking of the Steyn Commission and it is mainly for this reason that the book demands a serious and critical review. It is the context within which the book has been written that is significant, not the book itself, for it is a product of that context.

The final chapter offers some guide lines on school and student newspapers. It is not insignificant that the author leans very heavily on financing, printing and circulation. This chapter takes for granted the affluence of white schools and is reinforced by the picture on the front cover of the book which depicts a typical news office in the privileged white community.

The book also treats the appointment of editors as a matter of course. The chapters by Ton Vosloo, "The Editor", "The News Editor" by H. van Deventer and "The Reporter" by D. Moolman offer but a description of their duties and the way things are done. No mention is made of the removal from office of editors such as Donald Woods, Percy Qoboza and the state banning of newspapers when they exceeded the bounds of the dominant consensus. The chapters entitled "How to Write a News Report" and "How not to Write" impose all the clichés of journalism on the student while at the same time infiltrating an ideological position in an unconscious manner. Even the chapter on "Muldergate" avoids serious criticism.

What stands out like a sore thumb is the book's astonishing lack of reference works. Also lacking are workshops which compare how this type of press stands in relation to newspapers operating in different socio-political and economic contexts. By examining what is not present in the book is the reader able to isolate its basic assumptions. By ignoring the repressive nature of South African society and the consequent restrictions forced upon the press, this book sets out to present a 'normal' view of *Journalism Today*.

One might refer here to the searching question posed by the radio programme, *Microphone In*: "Can We Afford a Free Press?" This question should be counterbalanced against the remark made by P. G. du Plessis, editor of *Oggendblad*, on television in February this year that South Africans should start expressing their concern about information which the newspapers are withholding from them,

rather than worrying too much about what is actually being published.

*Joernalistiek Vandag* does not enhance the Year of the Press, mainly because it aims to teach students to accept the way things are, to observe within these confines and to conform rather than probe, test and question.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. All direct quotes are English translations from the Afrikaans
2. Boshoff has functioned as an Arts page reviewer, often politically critical.
3. Tomaselli, K.G. and Tomaselli, R. 1981: "Ideology/Culture/Hegemony and Mass Media in South Africa: A literature Survey", *Critical Arts*, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 12
4. May, A.F. 1963: *Joernalistiek, 'n Kursus vir Beginners*. Cape Town, SA Book Centre
5. A lecture given at Michigan in August 1981

# TABLOID

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