

Tracking transformation

Arts, politics and consumerism in the arts section of
the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian*, 1985-2000

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Thank you.

DECLARATION

I, Teresa Groetan, declare that the work presented in this dissertation is my own. Any work done by other persons has been duly acknowledged.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Teresa Groetan". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name and last name clearly distinguishable.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The arts are one of the deepest and most complicated ways in which humanity reflects upon itself. I think the business of criticism is part of that reflection. And I think the more we can help people understand how the arts do what they do, the more it can allow people access into that whole realm in which we become conscious, feeling, intelligent human beings, able to reflect upon ourselves, able to look at our urges, our needs, our desires, and not just be cogs in some vast machine (Shaun de Waal in interview, 2000).

The arts are important tools for human expression. The arts express all sides of human life, subconscious feelings, everyday experience or strong political affinities. Arts journalists have the role of the mediator between the arts and their audience. According to Denis McQuail the media “can have effects (positive and negative) on the cultural ‘environment’ of individuals as well as on personal taste, customs and ways of behaving” (1992: 275). Arts journalists can choose to write about Hollywood movie stars or the street musician, they can write about the latest Broadway show or kwaito music. Arts journalists can focus on the well-known, easily consumed arts or they can seek the counter-culture, which through the work of the arts journalists may become known, accepted or even liked by new audiences.

In 1961 the bilingual South African art magazine *Our Art II/Ons Kuns II* published an essay on the black South African painter Gerard Sekoto. Shortly after, the national galleries in Kimberley, Pretoria and Cape Town decided to buy Sekoto’s art as their first purchase by a black artist (Rankin, 1995). This anecdote illustrates how influential the mass media can be in shaping public opinion. McQuail outlines three reasons why the social value attached to culture leads to a concern with the performance of the mass media. Firstly, media produce and disseminate cultural texts, works which may have intrinsic cultural value. Secondly, media may be important channels for the public communication activities of other cultural institutions, like the arts or education. Thirdly, media are important for participation in cultural activities and national and regional identity (1992: 276).

Since 1985 the national newspaper the *Mail&Guardian* (previously the *Weekly Mail*) has offered the public a broad-based perspective on the South African arts scene. Hence, the arts journalists in the *Mail&Guardian* continue to play a key role through their covering of the arts in South Africa. The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how the arts are depicted, represented and discussed in the *Mail&Guardian*. The research explores the extent to which the changing political arena in South Africa has impacted on the arts journalism in the *Mail&Guardian*.

In the *Base Document*, the policy framework of the Reconstruction and Development Programme from 1994, the South African government claims to “affirm and promote the rich and diverse expression of South African culture” and states that “neglected and suppressed aspects of our people’s culture must be preserved” (ANC, 1994: 6). However, the extent to which the guidelines have been enacted by the government itself or by the media remains debatable. Through the research, I aim to assess whether McQuail’s (1992) dimensions and indicators of cultural quality are indicative of the changing arts journalism in the *Mail&Guardian*. Have “criteria of social morality and/or political value” (1992: 286) been replaced with “commercial criteria for success [?]” (1992: 287).

The role of the arts in society

Paragraph 16 in The Bill of Rights of the South African Constitution states: “Everyone has the right to freedom of expression, which includes (...) freedom of artistic creativity” (The Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, 1996). The theorist Lars Peterson (1988) defines arts and culture as intrinsic values of human life:

Arts and culture have become very emotionally loaded terms, which explain their importance. The reason is that the definitions pull demarcations for human quality of life. How you define arts and culture rely on how you value human life. The deeper meaning of the words are also concerned with democracy. In the definitions of arts and culture you include or exclude humans and their lives, feelings and dreams, their tastes and their experiences¹ (Peterson in Bech-Karlsen, 1991: 119).

A conference about the arts held in the United States in 1997 concluded that the arts form an important part in most people’s lives, and are therefore important to support

(American Assembly, 1997). Artists, critics, business people, academics and politicians met to discuss the public purpose of the arts in society. The conference identified several reasons for the importance of the arts: the arts help to define what it is to be American by building a sense of the nation's identity, by reinforcing the reality of American pluralism and by advancing democratic values at home and abroad. The arts contribute to quality of life and economic growth by making America's communities more liveable and prosperous and by increasing the nation's prosperity domestically and globally. The arts help to form an educated and aware citizenry by promoting understanding in a diverse society, by developing competencies in school and at work, and by advancing freedom of inquiry and an open exchange of ideas and values. Finally, the arts enrich individual life by encouraging individual creativity, spirit and potential and by providing release, relaxation and entertainment (American Assembly, 1997: 7-8).

South Africa faces many of the same challenges as the United States. Both countries are multicultural and have a history of oppression, and both countries also have a huge potential in making use of this cultural diversity to address some of the negative aspects of the society. The definitions of arts and culture in "The White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage" (Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, 1996) stress the diversity of the peoples of South Africa:

Arts refer to but are not restricted to all forms and traditions of dance, drama, music, music theatre, visual arts, crafts, design, written and oral literature (...) Culture refers to the dynamic totality of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features which characterise a society or social group. It includes the arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions, heritage and beliefs developed over time and subject to change (The Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, 1996).

The first research ever conducted on the arts in South Africa reveals a huge support for the arts among the South African population (Greig, *The Sunday Independent*, February 18 2001 and Friedman, *The Mail&Guardian*, March 30 2001). The survey, conducted by the South African research company Markinor on behalf of the Western Cape's Spier

¹ My translation.

Estate, states that three in five people would like more of an opportunity to take part in artistic activities themselves. As much as 93 per cent want their children to take part in plays, learn to play a musical instrument or read poetry. Four in five respondents would like more public funding to the arts, and three out of four believe more efforts should be made to make the arts more accessible (Friedman, *The Mail&Guardian*, March 30 2001).

The belief that the interest in the arts decreases with lack of education and social class is revealed untrue. The poorer parts of the South African population are no less interested in the arts than the more affluent. The support for public funding of the arts is particularly good amongst people with income less than R5 000 a year, with a support rate of 82 per cent (Greig, *The Sunday Independent*, February 18 2001). Most respondents believe the arts encourage tourism, help children achieve at school, improve cultural expression, contribute to national pride and create jobs (Greig, *The Sunday Independent*, February 18 2001). Sadly, many South Africans do not have access to experience the arts. One in four respondents have never participated in the arts, blacks being the least probable to have this opportunity (Greig, *The Sunday Independent*, February 18 2001).

During the apartheid era, the purpose of the arts was debated heavily in South Africa. Arts and culture were seen by many political activists as part of the struggle. For them, the purpose of artistic expression was to disclose the brutality of the apartheid regime. Some people went so far as to state that this was the only purpose of the arts, and criticised people like Paul Simon, who recorded an album with South African musicians and went on tour in South Africa in 1985, for not being “expressly anti-apartheid” (Nixon, 1994: 166). One of South Africa’s most popular singers, Sibongile Khumalo, describes the artistic climate at the time:

During those times when you talked of the arts for social reconstruction you might as well have been talking about the ANC or PAC, and you could end up in the jailhouse. Well, our cultural work through political activism started very hesitantly, but we ended up saying to hell with them, this is the work we are involved in (Khumalo and Chakela 1996: 34).

The debate was particularly heated in 1990 after an article in the *Weekly Mail* by the legal specialist in the ANC, Albie Sachs. The article, which builds on a paper delivered at an ANC seminar, states that those involved in the arts in South Africa must move away from only evaluating the political aspects of the arts:

Instead of getting real criticism, we get solidarity criticism. Our artists are not pushed to improve the quality of their work, it is enough that it is politically correct. The more fists and spears and guns, the better. The range of themes is narrowed down so much that all that is funny or curious or genuinely tragic in the world is extruded (...) It is as though our rulers stalk every page and haunt every picture; everything is obsessed by the oppressors and the trauma they have imposed, nothing is about us and the new consciousness we are developing (Sachs, the *Weekly Mail*, February 2 to 8 1990).

Sachs' opinions were not received well within leading ANC circles. The Cultural Desk, which was the organ organising the cultural boycott from South Africa, answered that "culture must be used as a weapon for struggle" (Molefe, the *Weekly Mail*, March 9 to 15 1990). The Cultural Desk reiterated the view of the 1984 Gaborone arts festival and the 1987 Amsterdam conference in that "one is first part of the struggle and then a cultural worker" (Molefe, the *Weekly Mail*, March 9 to 15 1990). Frank Mentjies was also vexed by Sachs' article:

It is impossible simply to throw overboard the age-old debate between those who accept the artist's social responsibility and those who opt for a narrower, more Eurocentric conception of art. Many black artists become writers or artists because they seek to express political ideas (Mentjies, the *Weekly Mail* March 2 to 8 1990).

At the National Cultural Congress in Hillbrow in June 1990, it was again stated that the primary function of the arts was to "bring to realisation of the people as a whole the importance of their own struggle (...) Culture is the soul of the people and therefore is very important, a very essential instrument of the struggle" (Powell, the *Weekly Mail* June 1 to 7 1990). The post-apartheid situation is quite different, and the challenge in

finding new meanings in the arts has been addressed by several artists and critics. These aspects will be further discussed in the main body of the thesis.

The history of the *Weekly Mail/Mail & Guardian*

On June 14 1985, just a month prior to the apartheid government's inception of the first part of the State of Emergency, the two young journalists, Anton Harber, 25, and Irwin Manoim, 29, initiated the newspaper the *Weekly Mail*. Manoim and Harber had recently been retrenched as a result of the closures of the newspapers the *Rand Daily Mail* and the *Sunday Express*. Some of the other journalists from these papers also joined the new newspaper, working for a very small salary or even voluntarily in their spare-time. The new creation was doomed by most mainstream newspapers in South Africa that did not believe a newspaper with hardly any money and based only on subscriptions would survive. The small staff at the *Weekly Mail* wanted to create a newspaper with an independent voice. This was made clear in the very first editorial:

The *Weekly Mail* is not just another newspaper. Consider how it was started. Not by businessmen more interested in the accounts than the news. Not by a political party wanting a mounthpiece for its views (...) We were convinced that many people felt that existing newspapers were not fully servicing their needs and were unhappy about the newspaper [the *Rand Daily Mail* and the *Sunday Express*] closures. We also felt it was time we made sure that our journalism was no longer dictated by interests outside of journalism. We were tired of being at their mercy (...) It was clear that people felt a need for serious journalism. It was clear that many South African newspapers, pandering to what they call "popular tastes" were not universally popular. It was clear that people felt a thirst for information about what was happening around them. So today we have the *Weekly Mail*. It is different because we will try to bring you the real news, even when that news may cause discomfort (The *Weekly Mail* June 14 1985).

Louw and Tomaselli (1991) defined the *Weekly Mail* as part of the independent social-democratic press, which were supporters of democratic change, but did not affiliate with any particular political movement. They also strove for independence from capitalist interests (1991: 12). During its first years of existence, the *Weekly Mail* struggled because of the newspaper's poor economic condition, and because of the political situation in

South Africa. In June 1986, a year after the paper's inception, the full State of Emergency was set in effect. The staff at the *Weekly Mail* was harassed by the police, the office ransacked, and the newspaper was banned for three months. The editors, journalists and the newspaper's lawyer became creative in finding loopholes in the law enabling them to publish what they saw as the truth about what was happening in the country.

The first arts editor in the *Weekly Mail*, Charlotte Bauer, was a retrenched columnist from the *Sunday Express*. She and the arts journalists in the paper set out to cover a side of the South African arts and culture the mainstream media did not pay attention to: "The *Mail&Guardian* was the first newspaper to cover the emerging indigenous culture that arose in the early non-racial bars in central Johannesburg like Jameson's, Kippies and the Black Sun, the fringe cabaret and the cross-over music" (Manoim, *The Mail&Guardian* June 9 to 14 1995). The State of Emergency affected South African society at large, including the artists. The security police detained actors and poets and refused them visas to attend openings of their own shows overseas and artists were driven underground (Bauer, 1996: 32). For some years the *Weekly Mail* arranged both a film festival and a book week, and identified with the artists who were against the establishment. The arts section of the *Weekly Mail* engaged in the political side of the national cultural issues and "the paper quickly became the burgeoning 'alternative' culture's noisiest barker, translator and umpire" (Bauer, 1996: 34).

In 1990 the *Weekly Mail* tried its luck as a daily publication under the name the *Daily Mail*, but it only lasted for a few editions. In April 1992, the newspaper entered a publishing partnership with the British newspaper the *Guardian* in London. In 1995, the *Guardian* invested one million British pounds in the *Weekly Mail* and became the major shareholder controlling 70 per cent of the shares. The name was changed to the *Weekly Mail&Guardian*, but changed again shortly after to the present the *Mail&Guardian*. The *Guardian*, and consequently the *Mail&Guardian*, are entirely owned by The Scott Trust.

However, the editorial and financial independence of the *Guardian* and the *Mail&Guardian* is guaranteed² (Manoim, *The Mail&Guardian* June 9 to 14 1995).

The present situation of the *Mail&Guardian* appears promising. It was rewarded the Crystal Globe for best international newspaper in 1995. It is among South Africa's fastest growing weekly newspapers with an increase of 13,4 per cent in 2000 (Stewart, *The Mail&Guardian*, February 23 to March 1 2001). The latest circulation figure for January 2001 was more than 41 000, showing an increase from 37 456 for the period between July and December 2000. The newly appointed editor, Howard Barrell, is flauntingly optimistic on behalf of both the country and the newspaper:

Our growth reflects a change in the public mood. More people want a challenging newspaper – one that confronts the issues and public figures in forthright and sometimes irreverent fashion. The *M&G* is that newspaper. This change of mood is a sign of our growing maturity as a society. I expect further, dramatic growth in the next 12 months (...) There are another 41 000 people out there who want the *M&G*. We plan to reach them (Stewart, *The Mail&Guardian*, February 23 to March 1 2001).

Previous research on arts journalism

The field of arts journalism is a neglected area in South African media research. One slightly related MA thesis on South African arts criticism, written 24 years ago, is all I have been able to locate (Schmidt, 1977). Unfortunately, the thesis has gone missing from the library, thus leaving me with nothing South African to relate my work to. In Norway, my country of origin, arts journalism is not a huge academic (nor journalistic) field either, but some research carried out during the last ten years is presented in this section. I also discuss recent work done at the National Arts Journalism Program at Columbia University (1999b). None of the studies is investigating the same issues as I, and it is therefore difficult to relate them directly to my work. However, Jo Bech-Karlsen's (1991) study of Norwegian arts journalism has been useful both to develop

² "The Scott Trust was created in 1936 to maintain the journalistic and commercial principles pursued by CP Scott, the long-time editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, and to avoid crippling death duties. Under the guidance of the Scott Trust, Guardian Media Group has grown to become one of the most innovative and

categories for my content analysis and as a guide for some of the questions used in the interviews. Recent surveys in the United States (1999) and Norway (2001) provide useful references for comparison to the content analysis.

Bech-Karlsen (1991) identifies a shift towards commercialisation and consumerism in Norwegian arts journalism, an observation which supports McQuail's contention of "commercial criteria for success" (1992: 287) previously referred to. He bases the study on interviews with 25 arts journalists and editors, analyses of newspaper articles, radio- and television-programs and fieldwork where he observed arts journalists in three different newspapers at work for one week. Bech-Karlsen claims that the media pays more attention to popular culture than to traditional cultural expressions, which could lead to a greater focus on commercialised products. What is fashionable and trendy means more than the message's originality and quality (1991: 25).

Bech-Karlsen criticises the great influx of previews³ in Norwegian arts journalism today. Previews, called a 'consumer-genre' by Bech-Karlsen (1991: 199) make it easy for journalists to be influenced by the organiser's self-praise through uncritical use of for example press releases. According to Bech-Karlsen (1991), arts journalists lack opinions, courage and imagination to make use of other sources, to ask different questions or take the time to seek different ways of writing the articles. Bech-Karlsen (1991) discusses how the feature rather than the preview can create closeness to the process of which an artistic expression consists⁴.

According to the journalism students Berit Solhaug and Inger Stavelin (1994), the coverage of the visual arts should be directed towards 'ordinary people'. They examine language, photographs, layout, use of sources (press releases, the artist, the organiser etc.) as well as interviews with journalists to find out whom the articles are directed towards and if they are examples of good journalism. Twenty-three out of 44 examined articles

successful UK media companies, with a wide range of commercial interests" (The Guardian Media Group, 2001).

³ I define a preview as an article focused on a cultural event prior to the event's opening or release. For a further definition of the different genres, see chapter three.

are previews. The rest of the articles are news, features, interviews, debates and reviews. Solhaug and Stavelin (1994) disagree with Bech-Karlsen (1991) in that it is only the previews that are examples of poor journalism. The language used in reviews is often not perceivable for 'ordinary people', thus fail to be good journalism. Solhaug and Stavelin conclude that in the coverage of visual arts in newspapers, the articles often function either as 'superficial adverts' or as 'highbrow intellectual analysis'.

Grete Jensen (1996) also has a more positive conception of previews than Bech-Karlsen. She analyses music reviews and previews in two Norwegian newspapers and one Swedish newspaper in order to investigate whether the journalists operate within two different discourses in reviewing popular and classical music. Jensen does not see anything wrong in previews functioning as consumer guides, but finds it worrying if an expansion of previews leads to fewer and more superficial reviews. She is also concerned that the possible negative results of the 'preview-trend' only affect popular culture, thus giving "this side of our culture an even less serious appearance" (1996: 1).

A recent report on Norwegian arts journalism carried out by academics in Bergen, Norway (Frey, 2001) concludes that the present performance by arts journalists in general is good. The report consists of a collection of articles evaluating different aspects of Norwegian arts journalism. Generally, the researchers welcome the development towards popular culture in the media, thus opposing Bech-Karlsen's conclusion ten years earlier (Frey, 2001). However, some articles are more critical. Erland Lavik (2001) asks if the arts journalists have become uncritical 'messenger-boys' for the arts producers by printing more and more uncritical previews (Mossin, 2001). He bases the study on interviews with arts journalists and public relations officers at three theatres in Bergen. The journalists interviewed are themselves sceptical of the increasing use of previews in the newspapers. The public relations officers consider personal friendships with the journalists as very important, and admit to targeting specific journalists they know have certain preferences in order to get the preview's focus as positive as possible (Mossin, 2001). According to one of the public relations interviewees, another reason for making

⁴ This is an aspect I will further discuss in the content analysis in chapter three.

special 'info-packages' is a general lack of knowledge amongst the arts journalists. The article concludes that the media's criteria for publication prevent more in-depth and analytical presentations of the arts (Mossin, 2001).

A major study on the coverage of arts and entertainment encompassing the entire United States shows that more than 50 per cent of the arts pages do not consist of journalistic articles, but "mechanically generated listings" (National Arts Journalism Program, 1999b: 8). The study finds that features and reviews⁵ are more common than arts news, and that there is a mix of high arts with mass culture and lifestyle coverage with fashion and design. The visual arts, dance and architecture get only cursory coverage, while television, movies, music and books are covered heavily. Big city newspapers cover the arts in more detail than in smaller cities. Newspapers adopt disparate policies for supplementing their staffers' work with local freelancers and national syndicates. The arts sections lag behind both business and sports on almost every newspaper, both in its allotment of pages and staff (1999b: 9). However, the report finds that many papers in fact are resisting pressure to become "extensions of entertainment industry promotion" (1999b: 11), even though editors and publishers in the United States "have touted the bottom-line wisdom of going with the flow of mass entertainment culture" (1999b: 11).

The major weakness with all the above-mentioned studies is that they are not contextualised. The studies solely affirm the present situation without investigating historical, societal, economic or political aspects. The reasons for the shift towards commercialisation and consumerism is not properly investigated in Bech-Karlsen's study. Stavelin and Solhaug (1994) do not discuss the reasons for the divide between 'highbrow' and 'superficial' arts journalism, nor what they mean by 'ordinary people'. Furthermore, the results in the surveys are not used to investigate what contemporary arts journalism can say about society: What does it mean that hardly any space is allocated to dance and visual arts while television and movies take up a great deal of space in American newspapers? Similarly, what does the shift towards popular culture in Norwegian newspapers indicate about Norwegian contemporary society?

⁵ The American study does not make a distinction between previews and reviews.

Content is not properly analysed, particularly in the study of Norwegian arts journalism (2001). The report states that the increasing focus on popular culture is a positive development. However, the content of the articles about popular culture is not evaluated, which gives the report more a form of assertions than of valuable analysis. Scrutiny of what the articles ideologically say, what values they represent, how well researched they are and how in-depth they go would add value to the contention that more popular culture is a positive development. What genres are used in the coverage of popular culture would also have been interesting to scrutinise in the Norwegian report. This critique could also be directed against the American report, which has a quantitative focus. To interrogate, for example, why architecture and dance only get cursory coverage would give the research more depth.

In general, the studies do not scrutinise the relation between arts, arts journalism and other aspects of society, nor do they pursue longitudinal studies to reveal historical changes. This disconnects the studies from history, politics and society in general. I intend to pursue such contextual aspects in my investigation into South African arts journalism through the use of discourse analysis. However, it is important to consider that the historical situations in Norway and the United States were distinctly different from South Africa from 1985 to 2000, which is the period I will cover in my research. Although it is important to contextualise the arts journalism of any country in relation to society and politics, the South African history particularly calls for an investigation into these aspects.

Outline of the thesis

Theories of discourse form the theoretical framework of the thesis, analysed in relation to related theories within the field of semiotics and Cultural Studies. The research is based on three interrelated methodologies: content analysis, in-depth interviews and discourse analysis of five articles printed in the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian*. Chapter two analyses and discusses theories of discourse using Jacob Torfing's recent work (1999) on new theories of discourse developed by Chantal Mouffe (1979, 1988, 1996), Slavoj Žižek

(1989, 1990) and Ernesto Laclau (1977, 1982, 1993a, 1993b). The theoretical chapter scrutinises philosophical problems arising out of discourse theories, and relates these theories to other theoretical fields applicable to the analysis of arts and arts journalism. My main theorists within in the field of semiotics and cultural studies are James Clifford (1988, reprinted 1995), Stuart Hall (1990, reprinted 1995; 1997), Raymond Williams (Higgins, 1999) and Antonio Gramsci (1971).

Chapter three is a presentation of the content analysis I conducted on the arts section in the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian* for the years 1985, 1990, 1995 and 2000. All articles and photographs are counted. The text part of the content analysis focuses particularly on revealing a possible change of focus from reviews to previews, relating this to Bech-Karlsen's (1991) findings in his research on Norwegian arts journalism. The photographs are classified in order to disclose whether the depiction of the different races has changed in the arts section of the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian* from 1985 to 2000.

Eight in-depth interviews are conducted with previous and present arts journalists and editors in the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian*. The interviews, which are presented in chapter four, have two foci. The first is on arts journalism in general: what constitutes good arts journalism, what describes bad arts journalism? The second focus is on South African arts and arts journalism, particularly on the journalism in the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian*. The questions relate to the connection between politics and arts journalism, entertainment and the use of sources in arts journalism.

The fifth and main chapter consists of analyses of five articles printed in the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian* in 1985, 1990, 1995 and 2000. The analyses make use of the research presented in the two previous chapters and draws theoretically on the presentation in chapter two. Fairclough's (1995) three levels of critical discourse analysis; the text, the discourse practice and the sociocultural practice form the theoretical base for the analyses, which aim to establish whether the ideological focus of the arts journalism in the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian* has changed from 1985 to 2000. In the last section of the chapter I use Gramsci's (1971) terms 'hegemony' and 'organic

intellectuals' as well as Fairclough's (1995) term 'marketisation' in an overall historical analysis of the arts section in the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian*.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORY

The theoretical basis of the research on arts journalism in the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian* is discourse theory and related theories within the field of Cultural Studies. Theories of discourse analyse and contextualise the text within a social, political, historical and cultural framework. According to Torfing (1999), discourse theory forms part of postmodern philosophy in that it is anti-essentialist and anti-foundationalist. It resists established, sovereign truths, because it claims no absolute truth exists. Only descriptions of the world can be true or false, and these descriptions are always made within a discourse⁶ (Torfing, 1999: 276).

Analysing the arts section of the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian* from its inception in 1985 until today is a daunting task because so many factors are involved in the formation and development of the newspaper. At one time the newspaper antagonised the apartheid structures within which it published, while at the present time it positions itself within mainstream South African media discourse. On both structural and individual levels, history, politics, society, arts and culture are all aspects that have shaped the arts section in the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian*. Discourse theory offers a broad, but clearly defined theoretical base from which to scrutinise some of these aspects. It takes into account the open and incomplete character of any social totality and insists on the role of politics in shaping social relations (Torfing, 1999: vii).

In the following chapter I investigate theories of discourse, focusing primarily on the work of Jacob Torfing (1999). Torfing gives a critical discussion of the latest discourse theories by Ernesto Laclau (1977, 1982, 1993a, 1993b) Chantal Mouffe (1979, 1982, 1988, 1996) and Slavoj Žižek (1989, 1990), examining in particular the relationship between the political and the social. Laclau and Mouffe develop in the Foucauldian sense a

⁶ Inherent in this is the understanding that the research is also established within a certain discourse that is decisive of the results presented. I am formed in a Western discourse, a foreigner in South Africa, white, female, an arts journalist and a student. These are certainly aspects that take part in establishing my own discourse within which this research is imbedded.

context-dependent, historical and non-objective framework for analysing discursive formations (Torfing, 1999: 12).

Discourse theory draws on and incorporates a broad base of philosophy and theoretical disciplines. According to Torfing, the concept of discourse has its roots in Saussurean linguistics, via Louis Hjelmslev's glossematics and the structuralism of Roland Barthes and Louis Althusser to post-structuralist theories advanced by Jacques Derrida (Torfing, 1999: 90).

In order to contextualise, discuss and elaborate theories of discourse, theoretical disciplines influential on discourse theory are presented and critiqued in this chapter. James Clifford's (1988, reprinted 1995) semiotic approach to arts and culture will be analysed and criticised using the ideas of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (1972, reprinted 1995), Jürgen Habermas (1989), as well as more recent writing by Denis McQuail (1992, 1994). Raymond Williams (1958, 1983, Higgins, 1999) and the Birmingham school are widely acclaimed within theories of discourse. Williams' concepts of cultural materialism will be investigated and compared to other theories presented under the heading "Arts, culture and discourse". The recognised semiotic approach of Stuart Hall (1990, reprinted 1995; 1997) is elaborated and criticised against discourse theory under the heading "Media and discourse". Furthermore under the same heading, Norman Fairclough's (1992, 1995) critique of the turn towards marketisation in mass media is discussed. In the work of Laclau, Mouffe and Žižek, the Marxist analysis of Antonio Gramsci (1971) was an important source of inspiration. Under the heading "Hegemony and discourse" I shall identify some of Gramsci's key concepts in his un-dogmatic and reformational Marxism, and discuss his concept of hegemony in relation to Fairclough's concept of orders of discourse.

Discourse theory offers a theoretical and philosophical approach, but according to Torfing has no ambition of furnishing a detailed framework for research. Fairclough, on the other hand, does offer a framework for analysis, but encourages additional methods. In this thesis, the methodological dilemma is resolved by presenting a content analysis

and extensive interviews as independent research in the two following chapters, and then incorporating these segments in the critical discourse analysis loosely based on Fairclough's methodological framework in chapter five. While the content analysis forms the quantitative part of the analysis, the interviews and discourse analysis form the qualitative parts. This mixing of qualitative and quantitative styles of research and data is called triangulation of methods (Neuman, 2000: 125), which in this thesis is applied to illuminate the investigative project from different perspectives. The methodological approaches in the content analysis, the interviews and the critical discourse analysis are presented in the relevant chapters.

Theory of discourse

Torring offers a broad and relational definition of discourse:

Discourse is a relational totality of signifying sequences that together constitute more or less a coherent framework for what can be said and done. The notion of discourse cuts across the distinction between thought and reality, and includes both semantic and pragmatic aspects. It does not merely designate a linguistic region within the social, but is rather co-extensive with the social (1999: 300).

While Torring has a philosophical and theoretical approach to discourse theory, Fairclough is concerned with appropriating the discourse theory to functional media analysis. Fairclough outlines two main definitions of discourse. The first defines discourse as "social action and interaction, people interacting in real social situations" (1995:18), a definition predominant in language studies. The other defines discourse as "a social construction of reality, a form of knowledge" (1995:18), found in the work of post-structuralists such as Michel Foucault (1977). Fairclough incorporates the two in his elaboration of a critical media discourse theory. According to Fairclough, discourse analysis is concerned with both text and practice in finding a link between text, discourse practice and sociocultural practice. While the text-level is the micro level in the analysis, discourse practice is the meso-level, including the production and consumption of text. The sociocultural level, the macro level, includes both the close context in which the text

is produced as well as the wider economic, political and cultural contexts⁷ (Fairclough, 1995).

Philosophical aspects of discourse

Postmodernism shares many philosophical assumptions with post-structuralism. Post-structuralism questions the traditional notion of closed and open structures. This has formed the development of a more playful writing, leading to the collapse of academic boundaries and the destabilisation of pre-given, self-enclosed unities (Torfing, 1999: 54-55). Postmodernity has demolished a belief in the divine grounding of the world, and questioned the possibility of a “fundamental ontology that can provide an ultimate ground able to ensure the intelligibility of a world of objective, social essences” (Torfing, 1999: 61).

These post-structuralist and postmodern notions form an important part of discourse theory. According to Laclau, the concept of discourse has roots in the transcendental turn in Western philosophy (Torfing, 1999: 84). Classical transcendentalism “urged us to focus not on the concrete facts, but rather on their conditions of possibility” (Torfing, 1999: 84). However, there are two important differences between classical transcendentalism as taught by Kant and Husserl and theories of discourse. Classical transcendentalism conceives the conditions of possibility as ahistorical and invariable, while theories of discourse insist on historicity and variability. Secondly, transcendentalism is in some sense anchored in an idealist conception of the subject as the creator of the world, while theories of discourse rely on a notion of structure. Thus, “our cognitions and speech-acts only become meaningful within certain pre-established discourses, which have different structurations that change over time” (Torfing, 1999: 85). Discourse, as a result of the post-structuralist deconstruction of closed and centred structures, is a “differential ensemble of signifying sequences that, in the absence of a fixed centre, fails to invoke a complete closure. (...) Discourse (...) determine[s] the

⁷ Fairclough’s three levels of critical discourse analysis will be further investigated when appropriated in the analysis of media texts in chapter five.

identity of the social elements, but never succeed[s] in totalising and exhausting the play of meaning” (Torfing, 1999: 86-87).

If, due to the fact that structures are changing over time and that cognition only is constituted within discourses consisting of open structures, a problem with history arises. If meaning is constantly changing, then it would be impossible to apply the theories of discourse to any phenomena other than contemporary ones, and even these would quickly lose validity. Hence, this could disqualify a longitudinal critique of the arts section in the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian*, since it would not be possible to evaluate the newspaper in a different political, societal and historical past without being able to analyse the contemporary discourse of that time.

Hall (1996) criticises Laclau and Mouffe’s notion that nothing exists outside discourse. Hall acknowledges that cultural forms are never fully closed (1996: 145-146), but insists on a reality outside discourse:

It is a sustained philosophical effort, really, to conceptualise all practices as nothing but discourses, and all historical agents as discursively constituted subjectivities (...) [Laclau and Mouffe] think that the world, social practice, is language, whereas I want to say that the social operates *like* a language (sic) (1996: 146).

While Hall’s (1996) criticism of Laclau and Mouffe (1982) is theoretically based, my critique also involves the methodological side of the problem. Torfing (1999), suggesting that theories of discourse should only be applied as philosophical critique and not as a method, is not as much affected by this criticism as is Fairclough. Nevertheless, it is Torfing who offers a solution to my critique by introducing the concept of ‘the discursive’ or ‘the field of discursivity’. As previously established, discourses are made up of open structures, which again leads to an absence of fixed centres. The centres are mutually substituting and thus will only produce partial fixation of meaning. A partial fixation of meaning rests upon precise conditions of possibility; hence there will always be something that escapes the continuous process of signification within discourse. The partial fixation of meaning produces a surplus of meaning, which is termed ‘the

discursive' or 'the field of discursivity'. The discursive is never completely absorbed by discourse and continues to constitute a field of undecidability, which discounts the possibility of a stable set of differential position within a discourse (Torfinn, 1999: 92-93).

This explains to a large degree my critique on the problem of the 'now-ness' of discourse theory; as history evolves a surplus meaning will always be created. Even though a discourse irreducibly will change 'character', 'truth' or 'meaning' with time, through the field of discursivity it is possible to track changes within the discourse. Hence, even though the discourse within which the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian* exists has changed, it is possible to develop a critique using theories of discourse in order to scrutinise the changing discourses and field of discursivity within which the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian* once operated and within which it operates today.

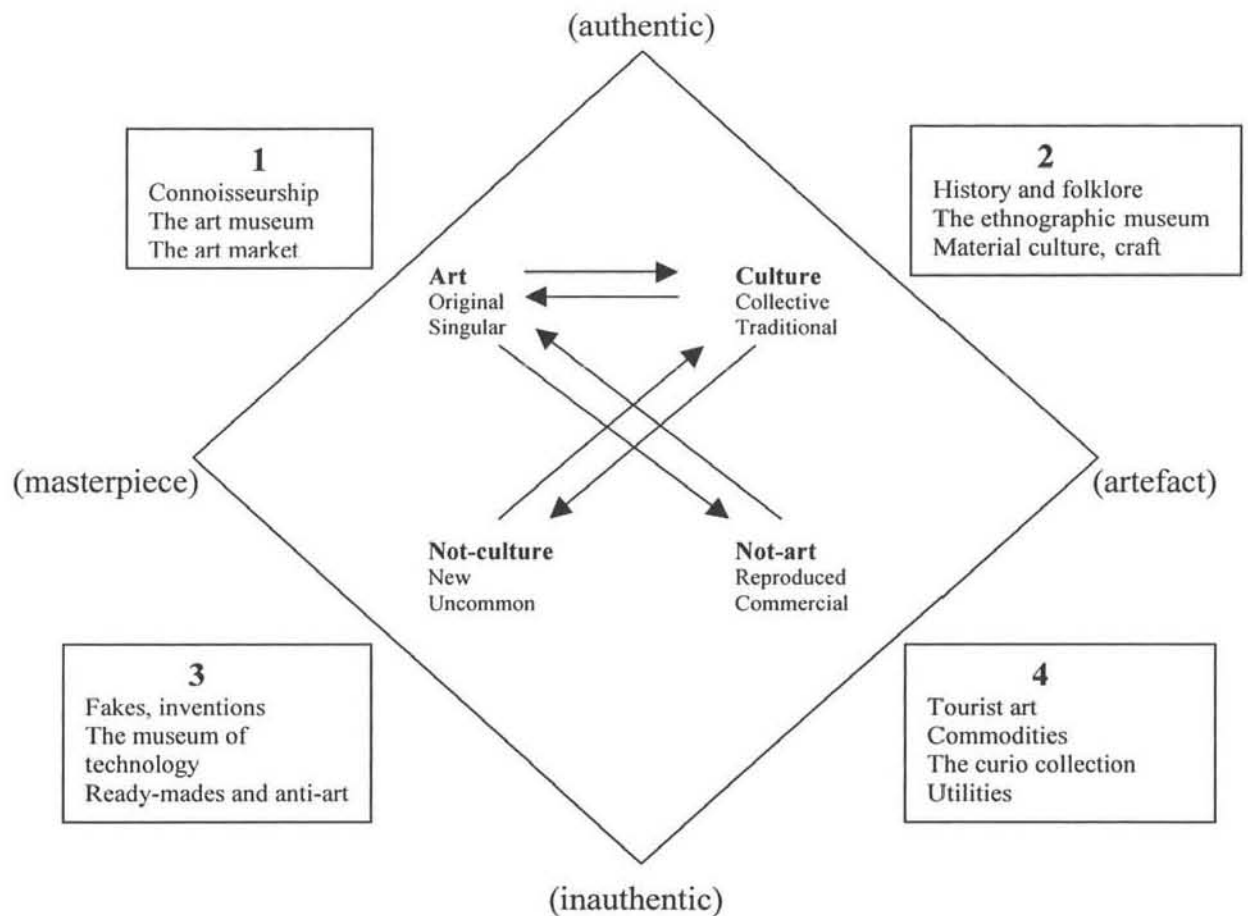
Arts, culture and discourse

Semiotic analysis is the basis for Clifford's essay "On collecting art and culture" (1988, reprinted 1995). Clifford breaks down the notion of arts and culture in a semiotic analysis of 'signifying practices'. Using a Maori exhibition in the West as an example, Clifford describes the individual collection of art as the pivot on which culture turns, and comes to the conclusion that this system of collecting arts and culture becomes crucial to the formation of "Western subjectivity" (Clifford, 1995: 49).

Clifford uses Williams' works to follow the elaboration of definitions of arts and culture. According to Williams, art predominantly meant skill in the eighteenth century. Culture was used agriculturally and personally; both plants and people could be cultivated. By the 1820s art increasingly designated creativity and expressive genius. The artist was set apart from or against society, whether 'mass' or 'bourgeois' (Clifford, 1988, reprinted 1995: 63). Culture came to signify what was elevated, sensitive, essential and precious in society. After 1800 art and culture emerged as domains of human value, protecting the best creations of humankind (1988, reprinted 1995: 64). In the twentieth century, the anthropological definition of culture emerged as alternative to racist classifications of

human diversity: “Culture in its full evolutionary richness and authenticity, formerly reserved for the best creations of modern Europe, could now be extended to all the world’s populations” (1988, reprinted 1995: 64).

In an examination of the concept of art, Clifford adopts Greimas’ (Greimas and Rastier 1968) ‘semiotic square’ in order to scrutinise four corners of distinction in art:



Clifford uses this diagram to analyse the temporal and spatial traffic of arts and culture: “While the object of art and anthropology are institutionalised and powerful, they are not immutable. The categories of the beautiful, the cultural, and the authentic have changed

and are changing” (Clifford, 1988, reprinted 1995: 59). For example, traffic moves mainly from zone two to zone one, making an object previously being termed as ‘ethnographic culture’ into ‘fine art’ after being located in Western art galleries⁸.

Clifford’s essay raises many very interesting points on the notions of arts and culture, and the changing temporal and spatial conception of arts and culture in relation to for example tourist art and crafts. Structuring the major points into a scheme makes it approachable for the reader although it also makes the concepts somewhat static and instrumental. Clifford does not scrutinise the discourses within which the different arts and cultures exist. He does not interrogate to a satisfying extent what lies behind what he calls the ‘traffic from one zone to another’. As John During questions: “What has happened to categories like exploitation or even power here?” (During, 1995: 49). Furthermore, Clifford states that the “distinctions between high and low culture were erased” (1988, reprinted 1995: 64) in a less elitist concept of culture in the twentieth century. He continues by stating that exotic, archaic and primitive objects “came to be seen as art. They were equal in aesthetic and moral value with the greatest Western masterpieces” (1988, reprinted 1995: 64). However, these arguments are most contentious, and seem to suit Clifford’s further analysis more than actually scrutinise how homogeneous this period of history actually was in terms of evaluation of art and culture.

Adorno and Horkheimer definitely hold up the distinction between ‘high’ and ‘low’ art (1972, reprinted 1995). They blame the industrial age for modern culture industry, which produces products for the masses, representing ‘average life’ in capitalist society. For Adorno and Horkheimer, ‘high’ art still exists as mass culture’s opposite: “The culture industry does not sublimate; it represses” (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1972, reprinted 1995: 38). A similar statement is made by Jürgen Habermas, who elaborates what he finds as a shift from a culture-debating to a culture-consuming public: “Serious involvement with culture produces facility, while the consumption of mass culture leaves

⁸ See chapter five for an appropriation of the ‘semiotic square’ in the discourse analysis of the articles by Ivor Powell and Mark Gevisser.

no lasting trace; it affords a kind of experience which is not cumulative but regressive” (1989: 166).

These ideas stand in quite direct opposition, although not politically, to Williams (1958, 1983 og Higgins 1999), on whom Clifford based much of his material. Williams, much of whose work forms the foundation of Cultural Studies, wanted to reform the Marxist focus on economy as the sole basis of society. Williams (Higgins, 1999) developed the term cultural materialism, a response to English literary studies considered by Williams as bourgeois in both theory and practice. Bourgeois literary analysis emphasises the individual over the social, and has a tendency to veer towards ahistorical and apolitical analysis. According to Edward Said (1983), “bourgeois literary theory produces an idea of literature as a pure textuality cut off from the entanglements of all worldly circumstance” (Higgins, 1999: 125). Cultural materialism is “the analysis of the constitutive grounds and force of all forms of signification at work in human society” (Higgins, 1999: 135).

Williams claims that norms and taste are nothing more than bourgeois categories claiming objectivity from an actively consensual class sense (Higgins, 1999: 128). Williams likewise objects to the idea of considering language merely as the medium through which thoughts are expressed. Williams claims that language is always a social practice:

No expression, no account, description, depiction, portrayal – is ‘natural’ or ‘straight forward’. These are at most socially relative terms. Language is not a pure medium through which the reality of a life or the reality of an event or an experience or the reality of a society can ‘flow’. It is a socially shared and reciprocal activity, already embedded in active relationships, within which every move is an activation of what is already and reciprocal or may become so (Williams in Higgins, 1999: 133).

Williams sees language as the practice of human sociality in itself, and criticises both Marxist and bourgeois literary theory for overlooking the productivity of the text. According to Williams, texts can contest, as well as articulate or embody, given

ideologies⁹. The task of cultural materialism is to attend to the constitutive role of signification within cultural processes, and to seek to integrate the three usually separated dimensions of textual, theoretical and historical analysis. Through this integration the fundamental social role of language and communication can be fully understood (Higgins, 1999: 135).

The analogy with theories of discourse is striking. Just as Williams through cultural materialism disassociates from one 'truth', both in dogmatic Marxism and in English bourgeois literary criticism, so do theories of discourse. Theories of discourse do not build directly on a critique of Marxism as Williams does, but discourse theory is influenced greatly by Marxist theories, particularly the reformist theories of Gramsci, which is an obvious source of inspiration for Williams as well. Williams' emphasis on ideology in language, that no language or expression is innocent, also resembles theories of discourse. Finally, perhaps the most important point in theories of discourse and in Williams' theory, is the relativity of 'truth'. For both positions, truth is always created, it is never pure.

Media and discourse

Semiotic analyses are often incorporated into discourse analysis and widely used in media theory. In the essay "Encoding, decoding" (1990, reprinted 1995) Stuart Hall develops a communication model analysing the encoding and decoding of a message in a complex chain of discourses of production, circulation, distribution, consumption and reproduction.

According to Hall's model, prior to sending the message, there is technical infrastructure, for example a television production. There also exist relations of production and a framework of knowledge that sends out the message. The first step in the communication process is encoding, 'filling in the meaning'. The second step is the message, for example the television programme as 'meaningful' discourse. The third step is the decoding of the

⁹ See the discourse analysis of the articles written by Pat Schwartz and Mark Gevisser in chapter five for a further discussion of text and ideology.

message into another set of frameworks of knowledge, relations of production and technical infrastructure (1990, reprinted 1995: 94).

According to Hall, what are called distortions or misunderstandings in communication arise out of the lack of equivalence between the two sides, that is the encoding and the decoding in the communicative exchange. Thus, the coding of a message does control its reception, but each stage in the communicative exchange has limits and possibilities. Every stage in the process is framed by structures of understanding, like economics and politics, and these frames shape the reception of the message¹⁰. This defines the relative autonomy of the entry and the exit of the message. According to Hall, “reality exists outside language, but it is constantly mediated by and through language: and what we can know and say has to be produced in and through discourse” (1990, reprinted 1995: 95).

Hall distinguishes between three different positions of interpreting a sent message. The first is the dominant-hegemonic position, which means the viewer is operating within the dominant code. This is the ideal-typical case of ‘perfectly transparent communication’ because the respondent decodes the message identical to the way it has been encoded (1990, reprinted 1995: 101). The second position is the negotiated code. Decoding within the negotiated position acknowledges the hegemonic definitions, but makes at the same time a more negotiated application to ‘local conditions’ (1990, reprinted 1995:102). Finally, the oppositional code implicates that the receiver decodes the communicative event in an oppositional reading. The receiver might perfectly understand both the literal and the connotative inflection by the discourse, but chooses to decode the message in a contrary way.

Lasswell’s (McQuail, 1994) basic linear communication model, ‘sender-message-receiver’, is scrutinised in Hall’s semiotic analysis with the intention of establishing the more complicated aspects inflicting on a communicative event or process. The basic communication theories of Hall are appropriated to a large extent in discourse analysis. The difference between the two approaches is that discourse analysis interrogates a wider

¹⁰ See the analysis of the article by Mark Gevisser for a closer scrutiny.

field than semiotics. While semiotic analysis, as exemplified by Stuart Hall, uses only the text in analysis, discourse theory opens for the use of various methodological approaches outside the text itself. As During (1995) states: "Semiotics' capacity to extend its analysis beyond particular texts or signs is limited: it remained an analysis of 'codings' or 'recodings', not of uses, practises or feelings" (1995: 5).

In his article, Hall does not enquire what establishes the discourses enabling different readings in the coding and the decoding of the message. Hall verifies the relative autonomy of the different stages in the communication process, and the relative autonomy of the receiver, but does not interrogate what constitutes the various discourses at the different stages of the communication process. Hall does not ask why each stage has its relative autonomy or what locates some receivers within the oppositional code while others are within the dominant-hegemonic code. Hall meets this criticism to some extent by developing 'the circuit of culture' together with Paul du Gay, in an elaboration of the communication model (Hall, 1997). In this model, Hall accounts for aspects regarding regulation, identity and representation in relation to consumption and production (1997: 1).

The aspects I criticise in Hall's article might be interrogated with the use of discourse theory. Discourse theorists investigate outside language itself in order to establish what influences the appropriation of different discourses. According to Torfing, discourse theory allows for the inclusion of both physical objects and social practices as meaningful parts of discourse (1999: 40). For Laclau and Mouffe, the concept of discourse "designates the constitution of a signifying order that is reducible to neither its linguistic nor its extra-linguistic aspects" (Torfing, 1999: 40). Another significant difference from the semiotic theory of Hall is that discourse theorists do not ascribe to a reality outside language. All approaches to the truth will have some kind of ideological luggage, because all realities are created within a discourse:

There is no pure original meaning, but only possible discursively constructed meanings (...) We can establish what to us seems true,

right and good, but the possibility of a transcendental grounding of our beliefs is forever ruled out (Torfing, 1999: 219 and 276).

Torfing puts forward three contentions to demonstrate that an adoption of a theoretical discourse perspective destabilises the traditional communication model. First, he claims that the essence of communication is not the exchange of intentional messages from a sender to a receiver, because written communication must retain its readability despite the absence of a clear sender or receiver. Citing Derrida (1988), Torfing asserts that communication rather acquires its identity from “the iterability of the mark in the absence of any empirically determined subject” (1999: 219). Second, Torfing states that the “message does not possess a pure, intentional content, but is discursively constructed in and through hegemonic (mass) media configuration” (1999: 218-219). Third, not only the message, but also the communicators and audience are constructed within a discourse, because, as previously stated citing Mouffe and Laclau, there is nothing outside discourse (1999: 219).

Having stated that all media messages are constituted within a discourse, that they do not possess one intrinsic meaning but are shaped by spatial and temporal movement, it is of interest to interrogate what influence the media can have on society and what may influence the media. The media have the power to influence knowledge, beliefs, values, social relations and social identities, and consequently play an important role in society, often more important than we realise (Fairclough, 1995: 2).

According to Fairclough, there are two tensions affecting contemporary media. One is an increasing tendency in the media to move towards entertainment, to be “marketised”. The second is the tendency of the media to become “conversationalised” (1995: 10). Concerning the first point, the media are being drawn into operating on a market basis within the leisure industry, because of increasing pressures and competition (1995: 11-12). John H. McManus (1994) has a similar approach in his study on market-driven journalism. McManus argues that normative principles of journalism are losing against the market forces, making news production into a hunt for profit rather than the public good. This is a tendency clearly seen also in the *Mail&Guardian*. When it started in

1985, its rationale was not about making money, but about making a change. After investing one million pounds sterling in 1995, the English newspaper the *Guardian* then acquired 70 per cent of the shares, and started making demands about the economic viability of the paper¹¹.

However, not only purely economic issues are at stake. Also more general social and cultural changes play a role concerning the shift towards entertainment in the media. Anthony Giddens (1991) sees these changes in terms of “societies becoming problematic” (Fairclough, 1995: 11). These are ‘problems’ relating to relationships based on authority, opening up and democratisation of social relations, a new public prestige for ‘ordinary’ values and practices, popular culture, including ‘ordinary’ conversational practices (1995: 11). South Africa might be a good example of a society ‘becoming problematic’ with a total political alteration, resulting in new and different cultural and social values given importance. Popular culture and ‘ordinary’ values have been given increasing importance in the arts section of the *Mail&Guardian* since the middle of the 1990s¹².

According to Fairclough, marketisation undermines the public sphere, because the ideology of the market considers people as spectators rather than participating citizens. Marketisation can be seen as part of normalisation and naturalisation of consumer behaviour and culture (1995: 12-13). This corresponds with McQuail’s (1994) charges about the production of popular culture. He claims that popular culture is produced by large corporations with an overriding view to their own profits, rather than presenting cultural value to the people, who “are treated as consumer markets to be manipulated and managed” (1994: 105).

¹¹ As Irwin Manoim, one of the two founding editors in the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian* formulated the *Guardian*'s economic demands: “Those terms were that a viable long-term business plan [had to] be drawn up, with a yardstick against which progress could be measured once that the paper [was] restructured along the lines of other *Guardian* subsidiaries, with a hierarchical structure, one person responsible for each department” (1996: 194).

¹² See the discourse analysis of the group of articles concerning the Miss South Africa pageant in chapter five for a discussion of the effects of commercialisation and marketisation.

The extent to which a newspaper is influenced by the general shift towards marketisation is based on ideology. Ideology by Fairclough is understood “as ‘meaning in the service of power’ - ideologies are propositions that generally figure as implicit assumptions in texts, which contribute to producing or reproducing unequal relations of power, relations of domination” (1995: 14). The media present or represent marketisation through language. Media language includes or excludes particular ways of constructing social identities and particular constructions of social relations. According to Fairclough, the mass media operate within and forms an important part of a system or discourse, and it is important to consider all the different aspects of discourse the media shapes, and are being shaped by (1995: 12). Torfing defines the role and the power of the media as a site of an identity-battle:

Mass media culture is a site where battles over identity, distribution and societal control are fought out. Mass media help to establish and maintain the hegemony of specific cultural groups by producing and promulgating social myths and imaginaries, but they also provide the means and material for resistance and counter-hegemonic struggles (1999: 210-211).

Hegemony and discourse

Fred Ingles claims that discourse is defined not by its will to truth, but by its will to power (1996: 108). The claim is based on the work by Michel Foucault (1977) regarded as a forerunner in studies of discourse. Foucault asserts that all arguments as to truth are driven by the will to power. To make a truth claim is to make a power claim (Ingles, 1996: 107). The concept of hegemony might help to understand the relations of power and resistance and how they are shaped in and through the language of the mass media.

“Hegemony and discourse are mutually conditioned in the sense that hegemonic practice shapes and reshapes discourse, which in turn provides the conditions of possibility of hegemonic articulation” (Torfing, 1999: 43). With the use of Laclau and Mouffe’s work, Torfing defines hegemony as “the expansion of discourse, or set of discourses, into a dominant horizon of social orientation and action by means of articulating unfixed elements into partially fixed moments in a context criss-crossed by antagonistic forces”

(1999: 101). According to Torfing, this definition is valid in analysing processes of establishing and maintaining political and moral-intellectual leadership, meaning not necessarily a state leadership, but more generally dominant discursive constructions in a society (1999: 101).

The Russian Marxists Axelrod and Plekhanov (Torfing, 1999) first used the term hegemony in describing the weak Russian bourgeoisie needing the help of the strong working class. The term was introduced to account for the extraordinary historical situation where the proletariat carried the task of the bourgeois revolution in the destruction of the feudal order. Hegemony was a term associated with the dislocation of normal development (Torfing, 1999: 107). In the Leninist tradition, hegemony is defined as the political leadership of the working class within a broad class alliance (Torfing, 1999: 108).

It was the Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci (1971) who replaced this authoritarian notion of hegemony with a more democratic one. Gramsci developed the term to explain the rise of Italian fascism. Hegemony generally implies dominance by one part over another with the use of not only coercion, but also more importantly, consent. Gramsci does not define hegemony in terms of preconstituted identities, but rather as a process of production of a new collective identity. It is the political struggle within the state, economy and civil society that determines the faith of competing hegemonic projects (Torfing, 1999: 108-109).

Gramsci identifies civil society and the state as “two major superstructural levels” (1971: 12) which correspond to the function of hegemony. Civil society consists of institutions like the trade unions, schools, churches or the media, while state institutions are the courts, the police and the army. Civil society is the engineer of consent, while the state most often is the site of repression. Thus, hegemony is a dialectical relationship between political leadership and moral and intellectual leadership (Gramsci, 1971: 12-13). Hegemony describes the balance between the ideological and the repressive, but it is only

weak states that need the use of coercion. Strong states rule through consent created by the moral and intellectual leadership:

A social group dominates antagonistic groups, which it tends to 'liquidate', or subjugate perhaps even by armed force; it leads kindred and allied groups. A social group can, and indeed must, already exercise 'leadership' before winning governmental power (Gramsci, 1971: 52).

In Gramscian terms, there exist two forms of hegemony: transformism and expansive hegemony. Both involve revolution and restoration, but restoration dominates transformism and revolution dominates expansive hegemony (Torfing, 1999: 111). Transformism is a defensive type of politics which involves gradual absorption, achieved both by active elements in allied groups as well as from antagonistic groups. According to Mouffe, the preferred method is expansion of relations of difference, and the goal is a passive consensus, which neutralises antagonistic forces and disunites the masses (Torfing, 1999: 111). Following the ideas of Gramsci and elaboration of Mouffe, Torfing defines expansive hegemony as a "formation of a collective will with a national-popular character, which is able to promote the full development of particular demands and lead finally to the resolution of the contradictions they express" (1999: 111).

Gramsci names the organisers of the masses the 'organic intellectuals', which varies from the Leninist version of the intellectual and his/her role. The traditional Marxist interpretation of intellectuals is "conveyers of science who can ally themselves with the proletariat by choosing to become professional revolutionaries" (Torfing, 1999: 111). These 'professional revolutionaries' resemble Gramsci's term 'traditional intellectuals' whom he distinguished from the 'organic intellectuals'. Traditional intellectuals appear to embody historical continuity above socio-political change. Philosophy and culture expounded by traditional intellectuals, such as doctors, lawyers, philosophers or clerics, are made up largely of anachronistic elements. They inherit a higher social position in society simply by their occupation, and are often looked up to by their fellow citizens in lower societal positions (Gramsci, 1971: 14).

Organic intellectuals are not distinguished by their profession, but rather by their function in directing the ideas and aspirations of the class to which they belong (1971: 3). The organic intellectuals articulate the concerns and needs of the people, and belong to the same historic times as those whose interests they express. Organic intellectuals may be involved in production, but their relationship to the productive forces is an essentially mediated one, and can thus be seen as constituting part of the superstructure rather than the base, both within the area of civil society and the state (1971: 12).

Gramsci's understanding of intellectuals involved all people: "All men are intellectuals, but not all men have in society the function of an intellectual" (1971: 9). The characteristic of an intellectual is that s/he exercises an organisational function, whether in the field of production, politics or culture (1971: 97).

Fairclough's term order of discourse¹³ can usefully be examined as a domain of cultural power and discourse (Fairclough, 1995: 67), and resembles thus the Gramscian term hegemony. The media order of discourse is used to describe all external and internal relational and oppositional discourses that constitute phenomena and how these phenomena change temporarily and spatially within the discourses constituting the order of discourse (1995: 62-74):

For instance, advertising may be rooted in the orders of discourse of commodity production, distribution and consumption, but it has come to be an element in the orders of discourse of diverse institutions – education, medicine, the arts, and so forth. It follows that discourse analysis should always attend to relationships, interactions and complicities between social institutions/domains and their orders of discourse, and be sensitive to similarities in social organisation and discourse practices between different institutions (1995: 63).

Fairclough finds it particularly useful to analyse the media order of discourse, because it affects major changes in society. A description of media order of discourse is concerned to specify what internal and external communicative events are chained together, and the

¹³ The term originates from Michel Foucault.

transformations texts undergo in moving along this chain and how earlier texts are embedded in later ones (1995: 65). An example of this is the negotiation within broadcast media between the more traditional order of discourse of public service broadcasting and the commercial order of discourse of the market and consumerism (1995: 63).

According to Fairclough, in analysing media orders of discourse, two important questions should be investigated. How unitary, or how variable, are media discursive practices? How stable or how changeable are they? Typical of a settled and conservative society are unitary and stable discursive practices, typical of an unsettled society are variable and changeable discursive practices (1995: 65): “Where there is variability, selection between alternatives may, for instance, involve political and ideological differences and struggles, attempts to cater for different ‘niche’ audiences as well as differences of professional or artistic judgement” (1995: 66). Applying Fairclough’s distinction between unitary and changeable societies, the South African society was, and still could be described as a society with variable and changeable discursive practices. The political situation during apartheid could be characterised as a hegemony based more on coercion than consent. As stated in chapter one, the *Weekly Mail* formed a part of the counter-hegemonic forces at the time. The arts section of the newspaper wanted to present cultural counter-hegemonic arts and culture. The extent to which they managed to bring into the limelight and critique arts and culture of the suppressed part of the population is covered through a content analysis presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER THREE: CONTENT ANALYSIS

The content analysis is a quantitative approach to establish whether there has been a change in the arts section in the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian* from its inception in 1985 until 2000, and if this possible change resembles general changes in South African society and politics. “Understanding how relations are constructed in the media between audiences and those who dominate the economy, politics and culture, is an important part of general understanding of relations of power and domination in contemporary societies” (Fairclough, 1995: 126). In order to investigate the relation between the arts journalism in the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian*, and politics, arts and culture, a content analysis of photographs and articles from the arts section of the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian* in the years 1985, 1990, 1995 and 2000, is carried out. The photographs are categorised according to race and gender, and the articles are classified according to their different genres¹⁴.

Methodology

As pointed out in the theory chapter, discourse theory, with its anti-essentialist and anti-foundationalist outlook, does not offer a clearly defined methodology. Discourse theory claims that no absolute truth exists (Torfing, 1999). Hence, it might be difficult to approach an area of research following the theoretical ideas of discourse too rigorously. Nevertheless, having theories of discourse as a philosophical, but not methodological base, gives freedom in research methodology. In Fairclough’s outline of a critical discourse analysis, he stresses the need to apply other forms of analysis than the textual:

[L]anguage analysis [is] one of a range of types of analysis which need to be applied together to the mass media, including complementary forms of analysis which can generalise across large quantities of media output (for example forms of content analysis as well as forms of cultural and sociological analysis) (1995: 15).

Hence, content analysis is applied in this thesis to provide a broad numeric insight to the arts journalism in the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian*. Content analysis is “a technique for

¹⁴ A genre is a particular style an article is written in.

gathering and analysing the content of text. The content refers to words, meanings [or] pictures (...) The text is anything written, visual or spoken that serves a medium for communication” (Neuman, 2000: 292).

In any statistical method there are obvious limitations. Content analysis has its weakness in that the meaning is separated from both the original sender, the text itself as well as the reader (McQuail, 1994: 276). The content analysis presents who is depicted on the photographs in the arts section of the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian*, but it does not expose all the people involved or mentioned in the articles. The analysis categorises the articles, but does not scrutinise the actual content of each article. The results from any content analysis will never offer the full picture. What this content analysis does give, is indications of change, both concerning the texts and the photographs in the arts section of the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian* from 1985 to 2000.

The survey is based on articles and photographs from 1985 (27 issues, 146 articles and 74 photographs), 1990 (46 issues, 384 articles and 148 photographs), 1995 (45 issues, 425 articles and 257 photographs) and 2000 (47 issues, 503 articles and 361 photographs). That is a total of 164 counted issues, 1459 counted articles and 841 counted photographs. The survey is based on the availability at the library at the University of Natal, and in their collection 3-5 issues from each year are missing. The *Weekly Mail* was initiated in June 1985, which explains the low number of issues that year.

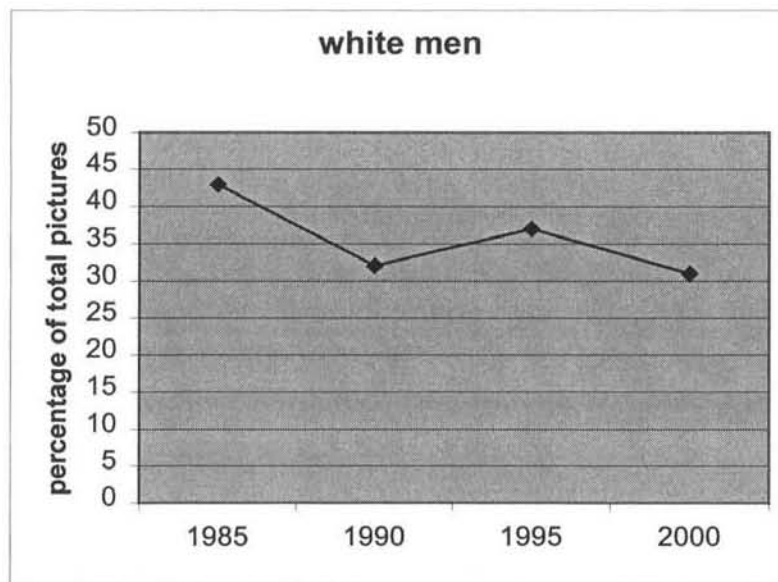
The number of pages devoted to the arts in the *Weekly Mail&Guardian* has increased following the general expansion of pages in the paper. In 1985 the last pages of the paper had the heading *THE ARTS* and covered movies, dance and fine art. During the first six months of 1990, the arts pages had the heading *THE WEEKLY MAIL ARTS* with *film, theatre, music, books, food and travel* as subheadings, even though articles on travel or food rarely appeared. In June 1990 a supplement named *WeekendMail* was initiated. The headings were *World, Arts* and *Feature*, including articles on science, technology and business. The *Arts* section had the subheading *arts, entertainment, books and lifestyle*. That year, articles from the British newspaper the *Guardian* started to appear. In 1995 the

arts pages were called *Arts and books*; in May the same year the pages were renamed *REVIEW*. In 2000 the arts section was a separate supplement called *Friday*, initiated in 1997. The focus is on lifestyle, leisure, travel, food and wine to a much larger extent than before.

Content analysis of photographs

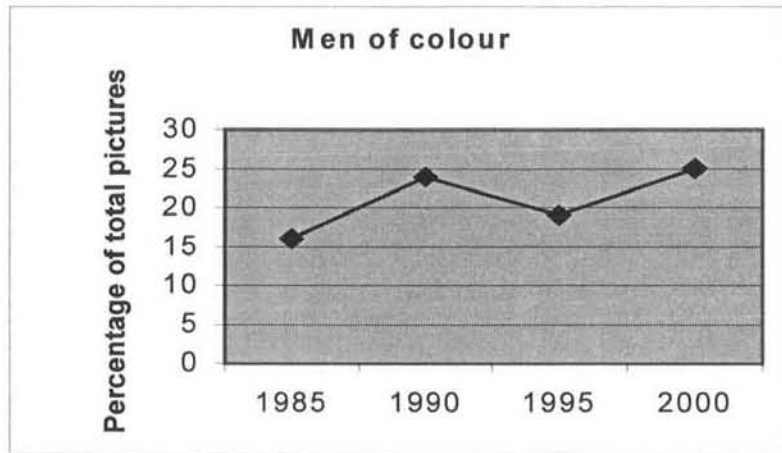
In the following section the graphs depicting the results from the photographic part of the content analysis are presented. Only photographs accompanying counted articles are considered in the analysis. Each graph shows a category according to race and gender representing this category's percentage of the total photographs. Each graph shows the change of the category's percentage in the studied years of 1985, 1990, 1995 and 2000. A short definition of the category follows each graph. A discussion of the results follows the presentation of the graphs.

Chart 1



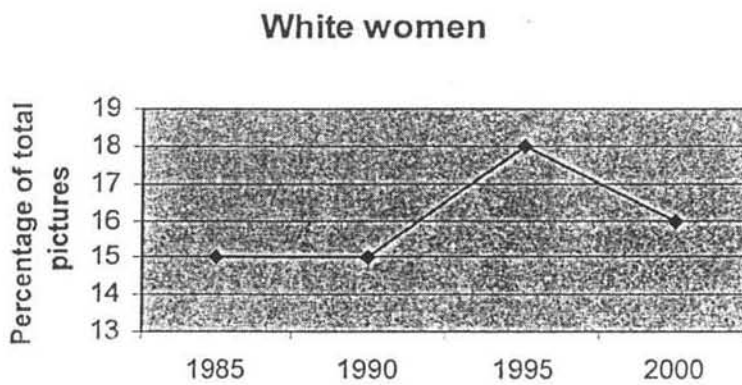
White men depicted in the photographs.

Chart 2



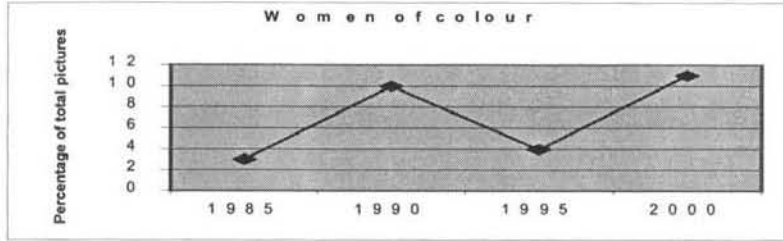
Men of colour include black, coloured and/or Indian men depicted in the same photograph.

Chart 3



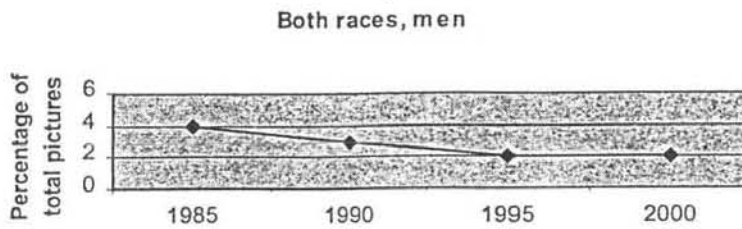
White women depicted in the photographs.

Chart 4



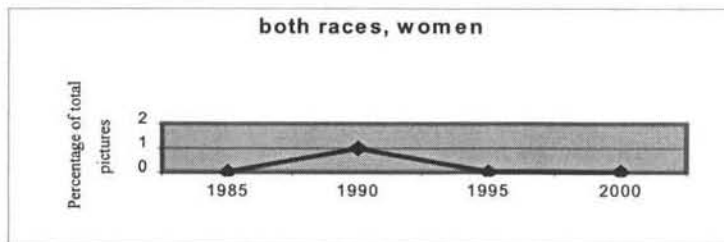
Women of colour include black, coloured and Indian women depicted in the same photograph.

Chart 5



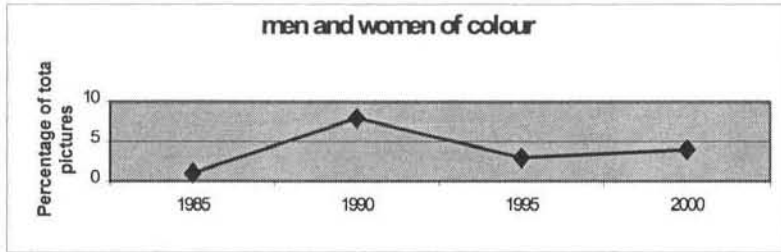
Both races, men include white men and men of colour depicted in the same photograph.

Chart 6



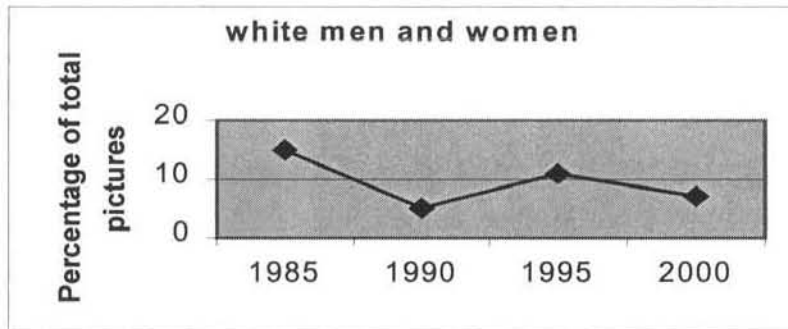
Both races, women include white women and women of colour depicted in the same photograph.

Chart 7



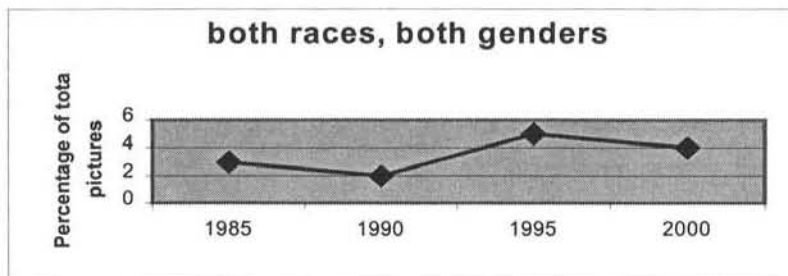
Men and women of colour include both genders depicted in the same photograph.

Chart 8



White men and women include both genders depicted in the same photograph.

Chart 9



Both races, both genders include different races and both genders depicted in the same photograph.

Changing representation in photographs

The graphs illustrating the representation of race and gender in the arts section of the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian* during its fifteen years of existence, are striking in their 'un-strikingness', considering gender and power relations in South Africa. Of all the photographs from the four years surveyed, three out of four pictures depict men, and nearly three out of four photographs depict whites.

However, the content analysis establishes distinct changes in the representation of the photographs in the arts section. The change in racial representation is quite clear. The percentage of whites depicted decreases from 73 per cent of the total pictures in 1985, to 54 per cent in 2000. People of colour increase from 20 per cent in 1985 to 40 per cent in 2000¹⁵. It is my assertion that the results of change in political and economic power in society are reflected on the arts pages in the *Mail&Guardian*. Guy Berger draws a similar conclusion on the development of race representation in South African newspapers from 1994 to 2000: "Willy nilly, news and photographs of black people began increasingly to take pride of place in most of the formerly white print media. White readers may not have liked this, but the representation reflected changing power relations that they could not wholly ignore" (2000: 12).

The content analysis shows that the change in the representation of gender is small compared to the change in racial representation. The political and social focus in transitional South Africa has largely been on race and has ignored to a large degree the plight of women, resembled in this analysis. White women constitutes around 15 per cent of the total in all of the years, while women of colour increase from 3 per cent in 1985 to 11 per cent in 2000. Although this increase is relatively high, the huge difference between male and female representation remains. Men are represented in 63 per cent of the photographs in 1985, women in only 18 per cent. The situation is slightly improved in

¹⁵ This includes the categories where only whites or only people of colour are depicted. The remaining categories depict both races in the same photograph.

2000 with 58 per cent of the photographs depicting men and 27 per cent depicting women¹⁶.

The number of photographs where different races appear together have hardly changed throughout the examined fifteen year time frame. Only 8 per cent of all photographs represent different races in the same picture in 1985. In 2000, the situation is similar: only 10 per cent of all photographs show different races in the same picture. The highest appearance is to be found in 1990, when these categories form 14 per cent of the total.

Interestingly, the figures from 1990 are almost identical to those of 2000. From 1990 to 2000, the representation of both white men and men of colour are almost unchanged. The white women category goes up from 15 to 16 per cent, and women of colour from 10 to 11 per cent. In 1995, 37 per cent of the photographs are of white men, while only 19 per cent are dedicated to men of colour. Photographs of white women constitute 18 per cent of the total, while women of colour are represented in only 4 per cent of all photographs from that year.

In explaining these tendencies, the political changes in South Africa must be taken into consideration. In 1990 the political changes started to make an impact on the situation in the country. Particularly the release of the world's best known political prisoner, Nelson Mandela, and the unbanning of his party, the African National Congress (ANC), had a huge impact. The clear increase in the representation of men and women of colour in the arts coverage of the *Weekly Mail* is possibly a reflection of the high spirits and hopes for the future characterising 1990. In 1995 however, the energetic promotion of anti-establishment arts and culture was no longer a logical necessity. The struggle for democracy had ended, the political situation was settled and a new political hegemony was established. Even though transformation had not quite started other than in governmental theoretical papers, the feeling that the struggle was over might have led to the 'setback' reflected in the photographic coverage in the arts section of the *Mail&Guardian* in 1995. In 2000, South African society is to some degree transformed.

¹⁶ The remaining percentages are to be found in the categories where both men and women are depicted in

According to general sentiment in the newspaper, it is no longer necessary to actively promote counter-culture, underground movements or specifically black culture on the arts pages, because a lot of this culture now forms part of the mainstream culture in the country.

It is of course not only the political and social situation in itself that determines the content of the photographs printed in the arts section of the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian*. The agenda and attitudes of the journalists and editors working in the paper are the final deciding factors. During the apartheid era, the *Weekly Mail* was defined as oppositional, as opposed to the *Mail&Guardian* of 2000, which can be considered mainstream. Areas of coverage in 2000, such as Hollywood films, foreign fashion and consumer culture was not on the agenda in 1985. For Charlotte Bauer (Interview, 2000), the arts editor in 1985, it was important to promote arts and culture that did not receive attention in mainstream media at the time¹⁷. The present arts editor Matthew Krouse (Interview, 2000) only evaluates arts and culture according to aesthetic criteria, resenting aspects he understands as upliftment and development issues in arts journalism¹⁸.

Content analysis of text

The text part of the content analysis includes all articles on live performance and fine art, that is, all exhibitions, plays and concerts. It also includes in-depth articles on specific topics and news-articles. The survey does not include reviews of CDs, books and films. A lot of this is foreign material, and not directly relevant to the South African context. Nor does the survey include columns like “Wrench on rock” or “The week on the Box”, because the columns do not necessarily deal with South African art.

The categories of the articles in the arts section reflect the genres preferred in the four years surveyed, and make it easy to pin down the change of focus on the arts pages in the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian*. As there exist no previous definitions of the different

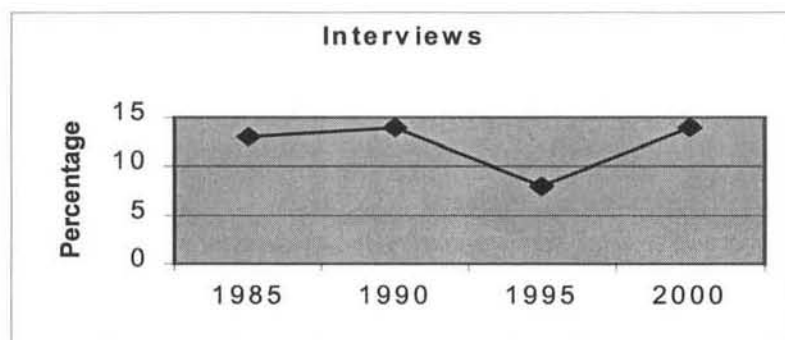
the same photograph.

¹⁷ In order to be able to judge more accurately the 1985 arts section’s efforts in writing about arts and culture outside the white mainstream, it would have been necessary to compare the *Weekly Mail* to other South African newspapers at the time. This is unfortunately not within the reach of this thesis.

genres in arts journalism in South Africa, the categorisation of the articles is based on academic knowledge and personal experience in the field of arts journalism. The Norwegian journalist and scholar Jo Bech-Karlsen (1991) defines the genres in arts journalism in eight categories: 1) News 2) In-depth or background 3) Reviews 4) Commentaries/Critiques 5) Debate 6) Previews 7) Feature 8) Columns (1991: 64).

The categories in the content analysis are slightly different. The main interest in this survey is to establish change in the appearance of previews and reviews. The articles are categorised into the following genres: 1) Interview 2) Feature/Background/Critique 3) News 4) Classic-Reviews 5) Feature-Reviews 6) Interview-Previews 5) Feature-Previews. I make comparisons with the results from the American (National Arts Program, 1999b) and the Norwegian surveys (Larsen and Knapskog, 2001) presented in chapter one. This comparison is helpful in describing differences and/or similarities in how arts journalism is carried out in three different continents.

Chart 10



An interview is an article based on a conversation between the journalist and one or more person(s). It can be written in direct question/answer formula, or with use of indirect speech. The interview is different from the interview-preview in that the reason for the interview is not motivated by one future arts event, but has more of a general theme.

Examples: Pat Schwartz, "A Far Cry from the Old South Africa?"¹⁹
 May 11 to 17 1990, p.23 (printed in chapter five)

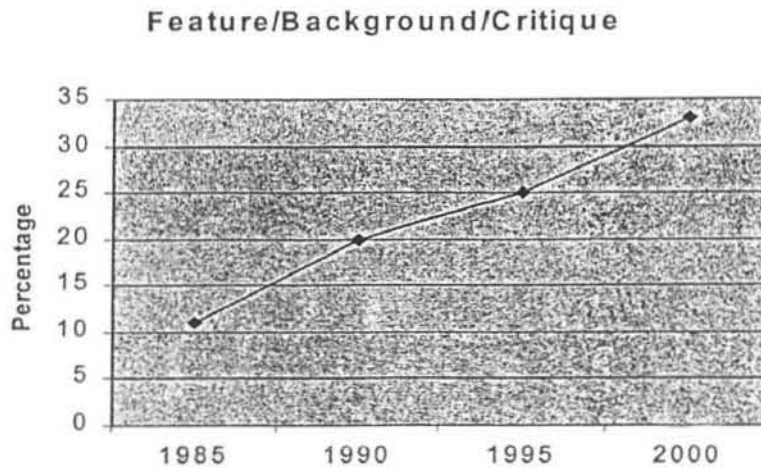
¹⁸ These issues are further discussed in the two following chapters.

¹⁹ See chapter five for a discourse analysis of this interview.

Matthew Krouse, "Pretty fly for a black guy"
March 17 to 23 2000a, p.3 (appendix one)

The graph shows that the interview is the most constant of all the genres, staying slightly beneath 15 per cent of the total surveyed articles all years, only dropping a little in 1995.

Chart 11



A feature is a subjectively written article. It may deal with subjects also written about in the news, but a feature always treats the subject from a different angle or viewpoint, not using the 'clinical' methods of the news-story. The article is based on personal experience, and it contains descriptions and impressions of people, places, landscapes and ambience. The journalist is always present in the story him/herself, and it is often written first person. A feature often contains literary qualities.

Example: Merle Colborne, "Durban's road show"
September 8 to 14 2000, p.6 (appendix two)

A background article can also contain feature elements, but is more concerned with giving information about a certain topic. A background article is usually quite extensive and its main focus is to give the reader information about a subject. The article is most often motivated by an incident in society. When the article is situated on the arts pages, the incident is about arts and culture.

Example: Thebe Mabanga, “A theatre built on hard times”
March 17 to 23 2000, p.5 (appendix three)

A critique is similar to a background article, but different in that it analyses a phenomenon the journalist finds of particular interest. A critique is more often focused on personal opinion than a background article is.

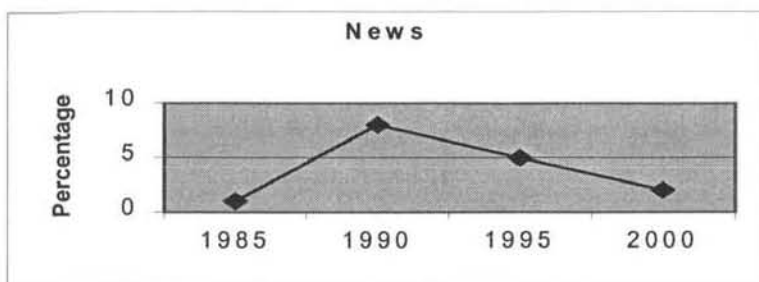
Example: Eric Louw, “Gloom beneath the jacarandas”
August 16 1985, p.16 (appendix four)

Matthew Krouse, “White men can’t joke”
March 17 to 23 2000b, p. 3 (appendix five)

There is an obvious increase in the category feature/background/critique, from 11 per cent in 1985 to 33 per cent in 2000. One reason for the increase is an intake of articles from the British newspaper the *Guardian*. The main reason is however a change of focus in the arts coverage in the *Mail&Guardian*. In 1985 the focus was mainly on reviewing the arts, particularly the theatre. Slightly changing year by year, the focus in 2000 is largely on lifestyle, travel and food. These articles are often written in a manner that fits the feature definition, even though they do not contain all of the qualities generally seen as a part of the feature genre.

The *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian* results resemble an international trend. The American survey *Reporting the arts: News coverage of arts and culture in America* conducted at Columbia University (National Arts Program, 1999b) shows that 32 per cent of articles about arts in American newspapers are features. The Norwegian survey (Larsen and Knapskog, 2001) shows that 44 per cent of the arts coverage in the major daily newspaper *Dagbladet* are feature/background/critiques. In the same newspaper only 11 per cent of the arts coverage fell within this category in 1960.

Chart 12



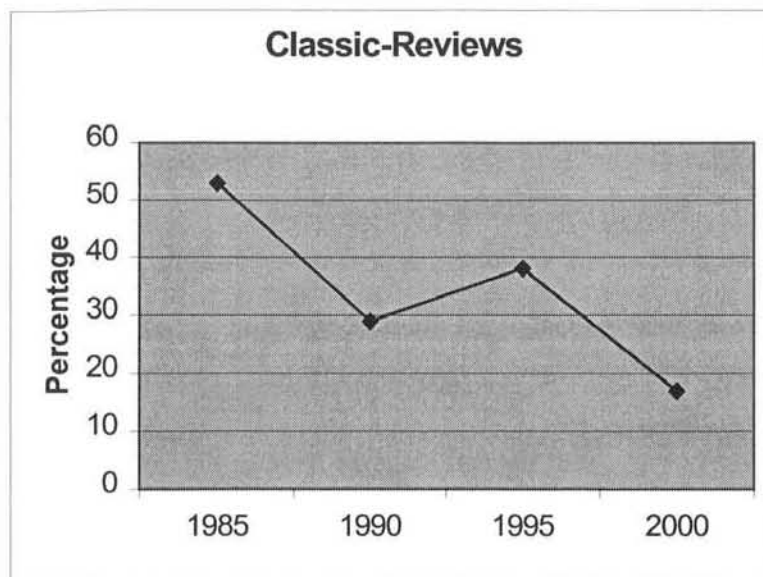
A news article on the arts pages deals with news, concerning for example economics, conflicts, prospects, governance and appointments in the world of arts and culture. The articles have the same structure as on the news pages.

Example: Weekly Mail reporter, “Boycott ‘breakthrough’ for G’town festival”
February 16 to 22 1990, p.25 (appendix six)

The amount of news stories on the arts pages has been low throughout the fifteen year time frame, constituting only 1 per cent in 1985 and 2 per cent in 2000. The reason is not that there is no news in arts and culture, but rather that these articles tend to be printed on the news pages rather than in the arts section. The increase to 8 per cent in 1990 is due to the policy that year of situating a news article on the first page of the arts section. The aim was to ensure the printing of a news article every week.

The American survey (National Arts Journalism Program, 1999b) reveals a higher news percentage in arts journalism in the United States than in the *Mail&Guardian*. 12 per cent of the articles were categorised as news. An important explanation of this relatively high percentage rests on the fact that the survey included all articles on the arts, thus counting news articles concerning the arts printed on the news pages. The American survey also includes obituaries, which in this content analysis is defined within the features/background/ critique category.

Chart 13



A review is an article that critiques an arts event, like a play or an exhibition. A review most often contains a description, but most importantly, an evaluation of the product or the event.

A classic-review is a description of the concert, the exhibition or the like, and an evaluation of the quality according the knowledge and likes of the journalist. The classic-reviews vary in the degree of subjectivity. The journalist may be of a particular opinion about the field that s/he is evaluating, either positive or negative, and that will influence the outcome of the review. Or the journalist keeps with what is commonly academically judged as good or bad.

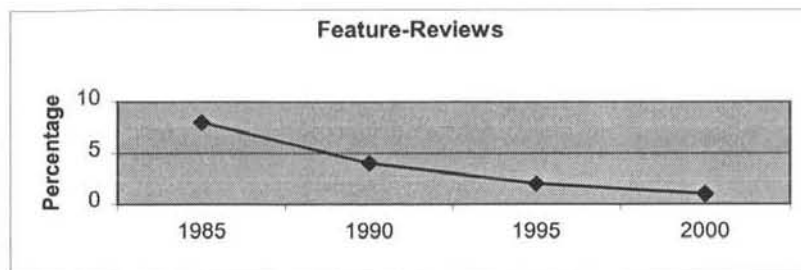
Examples: Ivor Powell, “Joeys gets what she deserves”²⁰
June 14 1985, p.19 (printed in chapter five)

Mark Gevisser, “Finding freedom in captivity”²¹
June 2 to 8, 1995, p.34 (printed in chapter five)

²⁰ For a discourse analysis of this review, see chapter five.

²¹ For a discourse analysis of this review, see chapter five.

Chart 14



The feature-review contains as much of an evaluation as the classic-review, but the feature-review has a personal and creative touch to it, much the same elements as the general feature articles have. The journalist uses herself in creating the article, and the feature most often involves an 'I'.

Examples: Ivor Powell, "Portraits towards a mythology of change"
August 9 to 15 1985, p.19 (appendix seven)

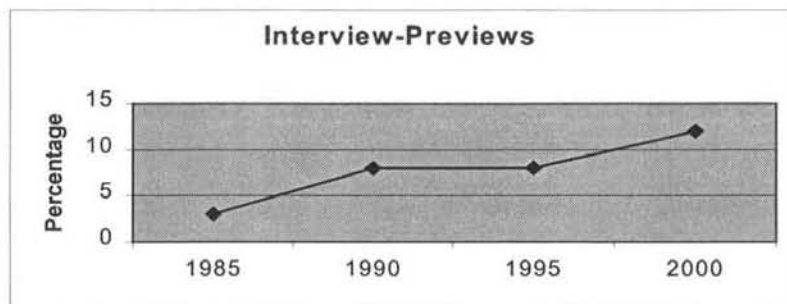
Arthur Goldstuck, "Have you been to an Ellis Park concert lately?"
October 19 to 25 1990, p.8 (appendix eight)

Marianne Merten, "A spotlight sweeps in dark corners"
November 10 to 16 2000, p.7 (appendix nine)

Feature-reviews constitute a very small part of the reviews in the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian*; 8 per cent in 1985 and only 1 per cent of all articles in 2000. Classic-reviews is the genre category with the largest decrease of all the categories. In the first year of the *Weekly Mail*, more than half of all the articles were classic-reviews, but in 2000 the genre only comprise 17 per cent. This development resembles a general international trend. In Norway, the survey (Larsen and Knapskog, 2001) shows that in 2001, one fifth of the arts coverage in *Dagbladet* were reviews, while in 1960, 46 per cent of the articles were in this genre. In the United States (National Arts Journalism Program, 1999b) one third of the articles were reviews in 1998. This figure is

significantly higher than both in Norway and in South Africa, which is partly explained by the fact that the American survey does not distinguish between reviews and previews.

Chart 15



A preview is an article written about an arts event, for example an exhibition, a play or a book prior to the event in question. A preview can contain descriptions, for example the journalist visits the gallery before the opening, or a visit to the theatre during a rehearsal, but it does not contain any evaluation.

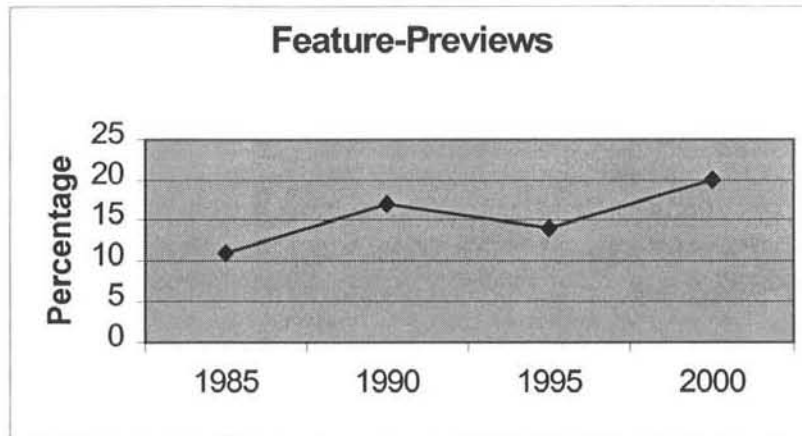
An interview-preview is an interview with a person involved in the event, either the choreographer, the playwright or an actor of a play, the author of a book, the artist of an exhibition before the release or exhibition in question.

Examples: Shaun de Waal, "Interview with the sex dwarf"²²
February 4 to 10 2000, p.5 (printed in chapter five)

Thebe Mabanga, "Moving to the African soul"
February 18 to 24 2000, p.4 (appendix ten)

²² For a discourse analysis of this interview-preview, see chapter five.

Chart 16



A feature-preview is often a short description of an arts event, frequently based on information gathered from a press release. It can also be a historical article on the subject, for example if there is an exhibition on political cartoons, a journalist with knowledge in the area may write an article on the history of political cartoons. A feature-preview may also be a personally written story by a journalist who has a special interest in, or liking for, the subject.

Examples: Celia Wren, “Demea kicks off – in a boxing gym in Hillbrow”
June 1 to 7 1990, p.21 (appendix eleven)

Mark Gevisser, “Young actors work for Aids education”
November 3 to December 6 1990, p.21 (appendix twelve)

There has been a clear increase in previews in the *Mail&Guardian*. Interview-previews has increased from 3 per cent in 1985 to 12 per cent in 2000, while feature-previews in the same period has increased from 11 to 20 per cent. That is a total increase from 14 to 32 per cent. Neither the American nor the Norwegian survey account for the preview

genre. This is unfortunate, because this is a genre that is often poorly carried out by arts journalists. By giving it attention, this could have been addressed and dealt with²³.

From previews to reviews

The focus of the arts coverage has shifted dramatically since 1985. This applies particularly to the shift of focus away from reviews to previews. As already mentioned, in 2000 the reviews only constitute 18 per cent of the total articles, and for the first time this category is smaller than that of previews, which constitutes 32 per cent. In 1985 there were 61 per cent reviews and only 14 per cent previews.

Bech-Karlsen (1991) connects this shift to a deterioration of journalistic quality. He sees previews as the main hindrance to develop a better standard of arts journalism. In his opinion, previews are consumer-oriented and serve the producers' need for attention (1991: 196). Bech-Karlsen (1991) criticises the preview for being product-oriented, distanced, not investigative and building on only one source. The preview is not able to grasp the processes and products of an arts event, because it is distanced: "The journalist is referring instead of investigating, [s/he] is repeating instead of reporting, outlines others opinions and experiences instead of making experiences of [his/her] own²⁴" (Bech-Karlsen, 1991: 200).

Bech-Karlsen's (1991) notes in his study a shift from critiques, debate and reviews to more easy-read, easy-consumed articles on leisure and lifestyle. It is interesting to note that this is similar to the American development. Cultural economist James Heilbrun (in National Arts Journalism Program, 1999b: 108) found that there was a clear shift of focus in the arts section of the *New York Herald Tribune* from 1960 to 1995. In the first twenty years, more than half of the coverage was devoted to the 'high arts', like theatre, dance, painting and sculpture, while the trend has shifted in the 1990s towards a major focus on popular culture, such as television and movies. Press observer Leo Bogart argued in 1990

²³ This factor will be discussed further in the last section of this chapter, as well as in the two next chapters.

²⁴ My translation.

that “cultural reporting is reduced to purveying succulent tidbits about the transient and irrelevant minutiae of show business” (National Arts Journalism Program, 1999b: 107).

In 1985 most of the previews in the *Weekly Mail* were short, and the articles were not illustrated by photographs. The content was informational, and hardly ever referred to more than one source. Through the years, the previews have been allocated more and more space, while the content mainly has stayed the same. Many of the feature-previews are built on press releases and/or an interview with a person involved. The journalist does not question the information given, and the result is often pure advertisement²⁵. In the Norwegian survey (Mossin, 2001), one public relation officer said she would sometimes evaluate a preview written by a journalist as “an advertisement worth 60 000 kroner”²⁶ (Mossin, 2001: 2). The Norwegian arts editor IdaLou Larsen, who works in the daily newspaper *Nationen*, solves this problematic genre simply by never writing previews: “Previews are advertisement. I am against giving charity to arts and culture”²⁷ (Roksvold, 1994: 24).

Still, it is problematic to argue that an increase in previews in itself is an indicator of a deteriorating quality. The recent Norwegian survey of arts journalism, which showed a similar development in the newspaper *Dagbladet* to the one in the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian*, concluded that it was a positive development (Larsen and Knapskog, 2001). Some of the previews in the *Mail&Guardian* are articles at length where the journalist digs deep into the subject, providing the reader with new and exciting information about a show, an exhibition or artists. These articles have evolved over the years, and were not to be found in 1985²⁸.

Rather than taking a stand about whether previews are bad journalism or not, the following chapters try to explain reasons for the change of focus in the arts section of the

²⁵ See the discourse analysis of the group of articles about Miss South Africa in chapter five. Another ‘good’ example of an article functioning as an advertisement is “The best of Biggie Best” by Melvyn Minnaar, Feb. 4-10 2000, p. 6.

²⁶ 60 000 Norwegian kroner is equivalent to R55 000.

²⁷ My translation.

²⁸ An example is Shaun de Waal’s article “Interview with the sex dwarf”, analysed in chapter five.

Mail&Guardian. In South Africa, a significant change in the media stems from a complete change of ideology of those in power, which have effected the values, ideas and culture of the country. As with the rest of the paper, one motivation for working journalistically with the arts in the *Weekly Mail* during apartheid was to address inequalities in the cultural sector of a white controlled society. This motivation no longer prevails.

Another factor that started to come more and more to the fore in the 1990s, are the controlling market forces. While the idea of making money was not considered important when the *Weekly Mail* was initiated, revenue play quite an important role today, resulting in more attention to advertisement. This focus on creating advertisement revenue might be one reason for the increasing amount of previews printed in the arts section of the *Mail&Guardian*. While reviews evaluate an artistic production after it is done or after it has started, a preview only informs about what is going to happen. Hence, previews might play the role of 'free adverts', as mentioned above, which of course make the genre popular with organisers of arts events, which again might make the organisers more likely to buy adverts. These are issues that will be further investigated in the two following chapters.

CHAPTER FOUR: INTERVIEWS

In order to establish a broader picture of the ideas, ideologies and politics behind the arts journalism in the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian*, I conducted eight interviews with present and previous arts journalists and arts editors. The interviews have two foci. First, on arts journalism in general, and secondly, on arts journalism in South Africa and in the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian*. An important issue in the second half of the interviews is to establish the change in arts journalism in the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian* from the inception in 1985 up till and including 2000. The main intention is to see if the arts pages have ‘followed’ the period of transition the South African society has gone through, and still is going through. Through the interviews, I seek to discover the motivation behind the interviewees’ work.

The interviews correspond to the content analysis previously undertaken in the research. The content analysis focused on the depiction of people according to race and gender in the photographs on the arts pages of the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian*, and on the genre of the articles printed. Through the interviews, I examine whether the increase in the depiction of people of colour in the arts section of the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian* is an intentional outcome of the efforts of the journalists and arts editors working in the paper. Possible reasons for the change of focus from previews to reviews, is also scrutinised.

The theoretical grounding for theories of discourse is that it is impossible to establish one sovereign truth. Cognition is only meaningful within pre-established discourses that change over time (Torfing, 1999: 85). Thus, it is not possible for me, or for the interviewees, to claim one ‘truth’ about what the arts section in the *Weekly Mail* was, and what the arts section of the *Mail&Guardian* is today. The nature of arts journalism resist such definite conclusions. As arts journalist Shaun de Waal expressed it: “There is no one truth, there is no one narrative, it’s all multiple, it’s all complicated, it’s all changing all the time, it’s all in a state of flux. Meaning itself is unstable, and that is the principle from which we have to work” (Interview, 2000). One example, which will be discussed further on a later stage in the chapter, is the state of the arts in South Africa today. Are the arts

about globalisation, as some interviewees see it, or are the artists turning back to a colonial mindset, as one interviewee experienced it?

Methodology

The chapter is based mainly on the responses given by the interviewed journalists and editors. Bech-Karlsen (1991) is the academic point of reference. Insights from Norwegian and American arts journalists and editors are referred to or quoted for comparison to the South African situation. The questions asked in the interviews are based on Bech-Karlsen's (1991) study on Norwegian arts journalism, but specified and added to in order to make them fit the South African context. The main body of questions consisted of:

- 1) How do you define arts journalism?
- 2) What goals do arts journalism have?
- 3) What is good and what is bad arts journalism?
- 4) What are the hindrances to good arts journalism?
- 5) Is arts journalism important? Why?
- 6) What makes arts journalism different to other journalistic genres, in terms of objectivity/subjectivity, language, readership and closeness to the sources?
- 7) What is the relation between entertainment and arts journalism?
- 8) What is the relation between politics and arts journalism? Has this changed during the existence of the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian*?

At the end of each interview, the interviewees were asked to comment on specific articles they had written in the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian* and which I had brought along. They were asked to relate their response to the answers they had given in the interview, what arts journalism is and what their motivation behind the article was. All the interviews were conducted in the Johannesburg area between October 31 and November 4 2000. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and one hour, 45 minutes. Edited versions of the interviews can be found in appendices 1-8.

Charlotte Bauer was the first arts editor of the *Weekly Mail* starting in 1985. She took a break as the editor for a few years while studying at Wits University, but returned and worked as the arts editor until she moved to the *Sunday Times* in 1995, where she now works part-time as a consultant editor.

Shaun de Waal presently works part-time as an arts journalist and books editor in the *Mail&Guardian*. He started in the *Weekly Mail* on a part-time basis in 1989, and has stayed with the paper since. He has been the entertainment guide editor, a sub-editor on the whole paper, production editor in charge of design and layout, deputy arts editor and arts editor.

Mark Gevisser worked as a freelance journalist in the *Mail&Guardian* from 1990 until 1997. Gevisser worked mainly in the arts section, but also on politics and news. Gevisser is presently working on a biography about Thabo Mbeki.

Matthew Krouse is the present arts editor of the *Mail&Guardian*. Krouse became the arts editor in 1999. He has written for the paper since 1992 and was the deputy arts editor three years before he assumed his present position.

Thebe Mabanga has since February 2000 worked full-time as a journalist in the *Mail&Guardian*, but does not work in the arts section only.

Ivor Powell started as an arts journalist in the *Weekly Mail* in 1985. Powell left the *Weekly Mail* in 1989 to work for different newspapers, but has consistently written for the *Mail&Guardian*, mainly on news, crime and politics until he started as a senior special investigator with the Scorpions in October 2000.

William Pretorius started as a freelance journalist for the *Weekly Mail* in 1985, mainly working on film. At the same time he worked for the Afrikaans newspaper *Rapport*, which quite soon became the reason for using the pseudonym Fabius Burger in the

Weekly Mail. Pretorius is presently a back-up film reviewer for the *Mail&Guardian* and works freelance for other newspapers.

Pat Schwartz freelanced for the arts section in the *Weekly Mail* from 1985 until 1991. At present she is the director of The University of Witwatersrand Press, but still writes once in a while for the *Mail&Guardian*.

Arts journalism

Bech-Karlsen (1991) defines successful arts journalism as engaging journalism, which makes readers feel they form a part of arts and culture:

Successful arts journalism can open up new ideas, expand existing perspectives, contribute to new experience and new understanding, and all this can lead to participation and involvement. Journalistically, arts and culture must communicate. Successful arts communication does not only create feelings, but initiates new thoughts. It is in this twofold the journalistic challenge dwells²⁹ (1991: 128-129).

These definitions form important aspects of arts and arts journalism, as most of the interviewees see it. A major focus in most of the answers includes what Bech-Karlsen defines as the ‘cognitive meaning’ and the ‘open interpretation’³⁰ of arts and culture. The cognitive meaning of arts and culture defines arts and culture as patterns of thought which a society creates. It is concerned with thought before action. It recognises that hidden feelings, thoughts and ideas may lie beneath actions. The cognitive meaning of arts and culture plays an important role in a reflective and analytical tradition in arts and culture reporting (1991: 72-73). The open interpretation values arts and culture as an aspect of all the activities of a society. According to Lars Peterson (1988), arts and culture is a dynamic value-system which participants in a society use to relate to each other and the world around them (Bech-Karlsen, 1991: 73).

On the one hand, arts journalism reports on arts and culture in general. On the other hand, arts journalism can involve the reader and provoke new ideas and ways of thinking about

²⁹ My translation.

him/herself and the world around him/her. Most of the interviewees include both aspects in their replies as to what good arts journalism is, or should be. Good arts journalism should “inform and enthuse people about the arts, make them want to go and see that painting, hear that musician, develop an interest in theatre” (Schwartz in interview, 2000). According to the interviewees, the promotion of the arts is particularly important in a society like South Africa, for historical reasons and because of the present situation where very little emphasis is given to the discipline. Arts journalism should be written in an engaging, lively and interesting way, it should be written with “flair, beautiful writing, colour, crisp, lucid pomp in the sense of freshness” (Mabanga in interview, 2000). Mabanga adds that it should be written in a palatable, accessible manner, in order to demystify the arts. Arts journalism should, like other journalistic genres, be enlightening, unhampered and unhindered. Arts editor Matthew Krouse makes a point about arts journalism being a consumer guide and states that “we are there to point people towards excellence”, including the journalists, the readers and the performers of art (Interview, 2000).

In accordance with the cognitive and open definitions of arts and culture, arts journalism is a process of interpretation. As expressed in the interviews, arts journalism critically engages with the consciousness of a particular time and place, and tries to articulate something about the souls and lives of individuals in a society. Cultural production can be used to understand society, and arts journalism “is also a valuable record of how things work in this country” (Pretorius in interview, 2000). Mark Gevisser tells a story around an article he has written which he believes is an example of good arts journalism:

The notion that an audience or a society helps make a cultural product is, I think, absolutely critical to arts journalism. So whether it's me or whether it's the audience... Perhaps a very good example of how this works is one of the favourite things I've ever written. This is an example of what I think is good arts journalism, that I am kind of proud of.

Mira Nair is an Indian woman who made a movie called *Mississippi Masala* which is about a group of Asians who are chucked out of Uganda by Idi Amin in 1975. And they eventually land up in the Deep South and

³⁰ My translation.

one of them has an affair with Denzel Washington and lives happily ever after. The movie has a very traumatic first part and then this very kind of light, frothy, romantic, second part. And there are these incredibly disturbing scenes of this Asian family being chucked out of their home. And all the sort of rhetoric of Africa for the Africans only and get rid of the parasites, you leaches, go back to India.

I sat and I watched this in Kenya, which also has a large Asian population, in 1991. It was me and a couple of other Asian people, and the rest of the audience was black African. And I watched as the audience got on its feet and cheered every single time there was this sort of Africa for the Africans rhetoric, totally missing the point of the movie. They wanted to see that and that's what they saw and it was devastating!

It happened to be on Passover, and I'm Jewish, so I suddenly had this whole sort of identity thing about myself. I went desperately looking around for a synagogue where I could pray, and of course I couldn't find one. And that's how I wrote about this movie, so it was a review of the movie but it also gave...I wrote about where I'd seen the movie, and what the movie meant and what it raised for me about being a minority, having an ethnic identity (Gevisser in interview, 2000).

South African arts and arts journalism

Discussing the situation of arts journalism in South Africa, the interviewees are in general very pessimistic about the current situation. The journalists presently working in the *Mail&Guardian* are less negative than the rest of the interviewees. Most interviewees see arts and arts journalism as symbiotic: If the arts are bad, then arts journalism will be bad, and vice versa.

The situation in a country like the United States is quite different (National Arts Journalism Program, 1999a). American journalists and editors attending a panel discussion on arts journalism described the arts, both locally and nationally, as thriving. Arts journalism, even though the newspapers were striving for resources, is flourishing and given attention by the readers, as stated by Raymond Sokolov, arts and leisure editor of *The Wall Street Journal*:

The first reader's survey showed we had twice the readership of the entire foreign coverage and foreign business sections. It was a little embarrassing. The investment in 75 foreign reporters all over the world – bureaus in Beijing, and so on – probably cost more than however many lunches I could have with freelance writers in New York in the course of the year. I calculated that if we did any better, there would be something truly corrupt about the way the paper was being run, which was, after all, a business newspaper (National Arts Journalism Program, 1999a: 8).

The South African situation is described quite differently. The respondents express a grave concern for the condition of the arts in South Africa today, blaming the present government for not accepting the importance of a thriving arts and culture scene: “The ANC were only interested in the arts and culture as a weapon for the struggle. They are not interested in arts and culture as an eminent of society, and I think that is very disappointing” (Bauer in interview, 2000). Another reason given for the regression of arts and culture is the lack of audiences because “a lot of the people who supported the arts have gone” (Schwartz in interview, 2000). Crime is described as making it difficult for white suburbia to go into the city to view plays or concerts. The respondents state that South Africa is situated ‘out of the way’ of the world’s flourishing arts and culture centres, referring to mainly Western artistic traditions. Indigenous African arts and culture are in general not taken into account, or treated as far less important than Western art conceptions in discussing the present situation of arts and arts journalism.

As for the black part of the population, there is still a “high rate of illiteracy, a high rate of cultural illiteracy” (Pretorius in interview, 2000). There are still economic, cultural and language barriers, which shut a major part of the population off from enjoying arts and culture: “We have eighteen million of the population that are never near a theatre, never near a cinema, never near a video-shop and never near a library” (Pretorius in interview, 2000). There is in general very little interest in the arts amongst the population. Schwartz describes the situation as appalling; that theatres, symphonic orchestras and the state ballet are closing down are signs of an unhealthy society:

A country, which doesn't have a vibrant culture, is one-dimensional. If all you are worrying about, and of course the major things you have to worry about are AIDS, hunger and poverty, but part of the quality of life, real quality of life, if you are offering people something beyond that, you've got to have a vibrant arts culture. (...) It's like never having jam on your bread and butter, I suppose. Culture is a sign of a healthy society (Interview, 2000).

Not all the journalists agree on solely blaming lack of funding. Ivor Powell says that there do exist a number of scholarships in fine art today, and that several of his friends are travelling and producing art for foreign countries. Some recognise a positive development in that arts and culture now has to be independent, and that previous state institutions themselves were to blame for not being able to adapt to the new South Africa. Bauer also criticises the above-mentioned state funded institutions for being old-fashioned, apartheid institutions unsuccessful in trying to copy European cultural institutions: “[The ballet company] had a very conservative repertoire. They didn't realise that even Western conceptions had moved along, so they were mimicking something they thought somebody in London would do” (Interview, 2000).

The interviewees no longer working in the *Mail&Guardian* criticise the media for not creating much interest in the arts, describing arts journalism as no more than a weekend guide with focus on shallow celebrity features. “[I]t doesn't draw on any depth or knowledge of history” (Schwartz in interview, 2000). The newspaper management does not put resources into covering of the arts, and the journalists lack knowledge and are lazy, writing shallow, unengaging and uninteresting articles. The interviewees agree on the *Mail&Guardian* being the best, but do not have much positive to say about any other newspaper in South Africa. Bauer asks: “How much can certain art forms really take off in this country without the support of arts journalism?” (Interview, 2000). There seems to be a vicious circle; no funding, no arts, no interest, no arts journalism.

Politics and arts journalism

Apartheid influenced arts and arts journalism in a major way, politicising arts journalism to an extent not seen in other countries during that time. Arts in South Africa at the time

were often either used as a weapon in the ‘struggle’ or as propaganda for the apartheid regime. The situation today might be described as a new struggle: a struggle for post-apartheid meaning³¹:

We come with so much pure political baggage in this country, it is really hard to refocus our gaze on other aspects of our society, or to see how arts and culture can give us, if not answers of who we are, but certain ways, interesting questions (Bauer in interview, 2000).

The agenda in the 1980s and the early 1990s was focused on giving space to what was being excluded from the hegemonic culture:

Arts and culture were becoming very politicised. We wanted to emphasise the politics of every aspect of society. I suppose one agenda was to get around to highlighting and giving exposure to people making artistic interventions that were about the counterculture at the time and who were not getting a lot of exposure and publicity in mainstream publications (Bauer in interview, 2000).

From a European perspective, it might seem difficult to separate intrinsic aesthetic value from the political message if the critic agrees on the message. Bauer stresses that the aesthetic aspect had a place on the agenda in her time as the arts editor. The criticism should be well-founded, valid judgements: “Just because we were going to give a voice to the formerly voiceless, we were not going to say it was all fabulous” (Interview, 2000). The theatre worked at times solely as a scene of political speech, although, because of the censorship, this was sometimes the only way information got out to the public. Nevertheless, a lot of the protest theatre of the 1980s was “just good theatre, really. And some of those plays are still being performed throughout the world, because they are good” (Bauer in interview, 2000).

For some journalists working in the apartheid years, the purpose of the arts was almost entirely political³². Most of the interviewees stress the important link between arts and

³¹ See the discourse analysis of Mark Gevisser’s article in chapter five for a further discussion on these aspects.

³² See chapter five for a further examination of the role politics played in the arts journalism in the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian*.

society, which during the apartheid era meant mainly arts and politics. Gevisser expresses his interest in “trying to understand South African society in transition”³³ through the arts (Interview, 2000). Most of the journalists no longer working in the field of arts journalism feel there was a purpose to arts journalism at the time, which they do not find any longer. According to Powell, arts journalism in the 1980s was a matter of consciousness, a feeling of failing a responsibility if he were to ignore the political art, and rather pursue his own personal preferences:

There was a strong kind of political purpose, and there were issues that needed to be addressed, and there was an arts establishment that really needed to be challenged. You could seem as though you were part of something that was changing the way things were. I think in a way we were very lucky at the particular time, because there was a real sense of a mission and a purpose (Interview, 2000).

Being an arts journalist during the apartheid era was also to be an activist, according to Powell. When arts journalism no longer formed part of the struggle, the interest faded. He does not find the arts scene or arts journalism particularly interesting anymore:

Now that we’ve got rid of the guilt about being white, I think there is a big move these days to ironically go back to exactly that kind of sense of being part of a world culture, which means first world culture. We are pretending that we are part of somewhere else, embracing an internationalist kind of culture rather than a third world or a local culture (Interview, 2000).

According to Powell, black arts journalists today have a very strong sense of mission in bringing black artists into the foreground. In this sense, the arts themselves might not necessarily be political, but there is an underlying political statement in the choice of writing about black arts and artists. Mabanga usually writes about black arts and artists, mainly because he knows more about them than the white journalists in the arts section do, but also because he “want[s] to present black artists to a white audience” (Interview, 2000).

³³ It is in this quotation by Gevisser that I found the title for my thesis.

De Waal does not think the fundamental critical project in terms of what arts journalism does is any different than before, but that the type of analysis has changed. Arts journalism is now trying to work out where the new South Africa fits into the global picture:

We are an emerging culture in a globalised world. We need to work out where we fit into things. Are we just a colony of the United States? Do we have some unique aspects of our culture that we need to nurture that say something to us specifically? This is what we are asking now, or should be asking now (Interview, 2000).

The present agenda in the arts section of the *Mail&Guardian* is ‘taking part in the world’ and no longer to show the counterculture, or intentionally seeking what not is in the limelight. De Waal and Krouse connect alternative arts and culture to ‘upliftment’:

You can do that kind of story and say, well, you know, here is a great story about how someone is running a jazz club in Katlehong. Well, great, he is uplifting people, but it’s not my job. I’m not a development agency, I’m not an NGO, I’m not mother Teresa, I’m not going to save anybody’s soul (De Waal in interview, 2000).

As an arts section you have to try to showcase good culture as opposed to good upliftment. Those are development issues. And I don’t think that the *Friday* section of the *Mail&Guardian* is a development publication at all. Not in the least. It’s an arts, entertainment and culture round up of the week. And that is different, and so, people may think I am a complete fuck-up for steering it in that direction, but I am not alone in that. That is what the requirement of the paper is. And if I did not think it was right, I would go and work somewhere else (Krouse in interview, 2000).

Entertainment and arts journalism

The Norwegian arts journalist Odd Soerensen, working in the newspaper *Nordlys*, defines good arts journalism as:

[r]ecognised by a broad knowledge base, in-depth knowledge in some areas and a well-formulated journalistic language. It is a sign of quality if one manages to capture the connections and relations existing in the past

and the present. I also think there should be an element of entertainment in good arts journalism, an element not to be underestimated³⁴ (Bech-Karlsen, 1991: 182-183).

Most of the interviewees find it interesting being asked about the relation between arts journalism and entertainment, stating that “the arts are supposed to entertain” (Mabanga in interview, 2000). A majority of the respondents agree with the Norwegian journalist Soerensen in his view that all arts and all arts journalism need to have an element of entertainment. Entertainment is seen by most of the interviewees as negative when it has nothing else to offer:

It’s like the principle of making money, if an art form aims only to entertain, it is likely to be fairly simple. If it aims to entertain in an educated way, and it aims to entertain by showing things you have not seen before, by frightening you a little bit, by challenging taboos, by coming at things from a new angle, by dealing with complex issues within a society, then I think it entertains in a meaningful way. I mean yes, the arts need to entertain, but if they overly entertain then that is all they are. They are popcorn (de Waal in interview, 2000).

Some of the interviewees see entertainment in the perspective of a lighter form of arts and culture, like circus or pop concerts, while others see entertainment as an integral part of all kinds of arts and culture. Another sense of entertainment in arts journalism is simply good, creative and entertaining writing.

Bech-Karlsen (1991) acknowledges both positive and negative sides to entertainment in arts journalism. The positive sides are that it may reach a broader readership, it makes the journalism more ‘user-friendly’ and it creates new possibilities in types of coverage in the arts sections. On the other hand, Bech-Karlsen sees a great threat in the underlying factor of commercialisation in entertainment. He finds a higher degree of celebrity and personality orientation, a ‘lightness’, and a neglect of analysis and depth as negative sides of entertainment in arts journalism³⁵ (1991: 92-95).

³⁴ My translation.

³⁵ See chapter two for a closer theoretical discussion on commercialisation and chapter five for an analysis of the situation in the *Mail&Guardian*.

According to arts editor Matthew Krouse, the arts section of the *Mail&Guardian* is a consumer guide and an entertainer in its own right: “Every week we make a little drama of the art world that we see around us. Our duty is to entertain our readers” (Interview, 2000). The product is arbitration between what the readers want, what the journalists’ want and possible advertisement revenue:

The move now is very much towards lifestyle, and very much away from engaging meaningfully with cultural production. (...) Lifestyle, entertainment, people are in a mode of escapism, they really are and I think that this country is, there is a lot of escapism going on (Krouse in interview, 2000).

According to Krouse, there has been a huge increase in the space allocated to listings. This corresponds with the results in a report put forward by the National Arts Journalism Program at Columbia University (1999b). The report laments that half of the space that papers devote to the arts consists of event listings (Freund, 2000:1). Krouse admits that he is to a large degree focused in giving the readers what they want:

I can tell you what the high interest area is, and that is television listings. (...) Everybody wants it, and they want their newspaper to have every single thing on television inside it. But they don’t necessarily want to read a story about one person’s opinion of a play he has seen (Interview, 2000).

Use of sources in arts journalism

Keeping the equilibrium between having a close relationship with your friends, and using them as sources for information, is sometimes tricky in journalism. Being inside the environment is on the one hand good, because it is an important way of gaining information the journalist might not obtain otherwise. Pretorius sees the advantages of working in a small environment:

You have more access to the people who create art here than in America. I mean here one could talk quite informally to any quite well known actor. You could not do that to Brad Pitt. [Becoming friends means] you can never be too nasty. But at the same time it gives you perspective. But you

have to have the ability to say all right there is a point where I cut off and there is a point where I am just going to look at that work and discuss that work (Interview, 2000).

Closeness to sources and the use of only one source was a confirmed problem in Bech-Karlsen's query, as well as in the research journalist student Terje Larsen (1990) conducted on the Oslo papers in Norway. The Norwegian arts journalist Anders Giaever, working in *Arbeiderbladet* (now called *Dagsavisen*), states: "It is a real problem that the environment is so small. The journalist often ends up in one clique in the arts and culture milieu. One is given a role and easily becomes friends with the people working in the field of arts and culture" (Bech-Karlsen, 1991: 122).

Arts journalists are just as dependent on a network as other journalists. It might even be a more difficult relationship because arts journalism is not about collecting facts from sources, but often about evaluation, using personal taste and opinion. How does one keep a good relationship after writing a crushing critique? The interviewees describe this as problematic. The arts and culture environment in South Africa is described as a "very incestuous society and there is no question about it" (Schwartz in interview, 2000). In the case of the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian*, there was and is a very close relationship on all levels: journalists, readers, audiences and performers:

If we did not say nice things about [the playwrights and the actors] all the time they would feel betrayed, like a sort of family feud, and every now and then it would end up in a bar and fisticuffs. I can remember one night trying to get [out] our theatre reviewer Digby Ricci who was certainly not up for fisticuffs. Digby wore rings and had a handbag, and wore white trousers. He was not a lefty, he was a liberal, a conservative liberal, but he was an excellent critic. There were two macho actors who drank too much, trying to kill him basically. It got so tense, we had to get him out of there. So there was a huge identification. There were people who saw the *Mail&Guardian/Weekly Mail* as their paper, their place, so if you were not nice to them all the time, they got very upset (Bauer in interview, 2000).

A very controversial review I wrote was [about] a movie called *Friends*, the first sort of post-apartheid movie. It was made by a

South African woman who spent years raising the money, and I thought it was terrible. And I panned it, I was very harsh about it, and it had huge repercussions for me, personally and professionally (Gevisser in interview, 2000).

Hindrances to good arts journalism

The respondents blame specific national features for the difficulties on producing arts and arts journalism in South Africa. Both lack of money and “the desire to make money” (de Waal in interview, 2000) are mentioned as hindrances. Furthermore, the demographic hindrances relating to language, culture, economy and rural versus urban dwellings are problematic. Some of the South African problems are international, while others are specific to the South African context. Bech-Karlsen (1991) lists hindrances to good arts journalism, part of which are beyond the control of the journalists, the other half are limitations within the control of the individual journalist. Of the ‘external’ hindrances, which the journalist cannot control, three are applicable to the South African situation. Firstly lack of resources, which include lack of staff, lack of money and lack of equipment. The second is time pressure, which includes work pressure, deadlines and competition to make the news. The third is the pressure from arts and culture organisers for journalists to participate in press conferences, to do interviews with particular artists and attend functions (2000: 241).

The respondents mainly focus on lack of resources, even though time pressure and pressures from organisers were implicit in the answers, or mentioned in connection with other topics. There were two main aspects stressed: lack of resources in the arts and lack of resources in the arts sections in the newspaper. With regard to the lack of resources in the arts, Krouse states:

I think the divisions in communities are a terrible hindrance. The lack of homogeneity in the culture in this country is interesting if you can use it. Terribly disturbing if you are trying to deal with it. The language barriers and class barriers are bad, and the thing that hinders good arts journalism is that there is a dire lack of resources [amongst the population] (Interview, 2000).

The perception is that the arts section in the *Mail&Guardian* is taken seriously by the rest of the paper. However,

[i]t's always a problem that our resources are stretched, so we always have new writers and writers who work from a position of good will. We used to have a staff of nine, [now we are] two full time, three retainers and there is Shaun de Waal [part time] (Krouse in interview, 2000).

The 'internal' hindrances which the journalists are in control of, are firstly a lack of knowledge about arts and culture and lack of knowledge about journalistic methods (Bech-Karlsen, 1991). Secondly, a professional *modus operandi*, that is a routine way of solving the journalistic tasks. And lastly, lack of ambitions, lack of personal courage and lack of professional critique (Bech-Karlsen, 1991: 241). Likewise, Bruce Weber, national cultural correspondent for *The New York Times* accuses both editors and writers in the United States for a serious lack of imagination in terms of ideas and assignments in arts journalism: "There is a certain imagination, scrutiny and power of observation that we reporters are supposed to have that maybe we do not deploy often enough" (National Arts Journalism program, 1999a: 4).

Although the main focus in the answers of the interviewees is on external hindrances, most of the journalists mention personal limitations as well. Ignorance and a lack of information are stated as hindrances to good arts journalism. The respondents claim that that there is a sense of complacency and lack of engagement amongst journalists, and that "many journalists don't have wide frames of reference, they don't know their history, they don't know their politics" (De Waal in interview, 2000). One assertion is that nobody is asking what constitutes art, and there is a lack of adventurous arts journalists. The art critics "tend to be very tied to their discipline and very tied to their understanding of what is art and how arts is made. You will not find a theatre critic going and spending time at township theatre projects" (Gevisser in interview, 2000).

There are not many people trained in arts journalism in South Africa. Gevisser believes it is a pity that very few talented black writers want to make a career in arts journalism. He

states that there are two generations of writers in arts journalism, “the one generation is the old school, they know their ballet or they know their theatre, and they’ve got a very limited way of looking at the world” (Interview, 2000). The old school is concerned with the more classic forms of art, which have a very limited way of looking at the world. Then there is the younger generation trained in politics and sociology but “they don’t really know about theatre” (Interview, 2000). There is a gap between those two groups, a gap that should be filled with adventurous and knowledgeable journalists, interested in both how arts are constituted and what art constitutes. These aspects will be further explored in the next chapter through the discourse analysis of five articles from the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian*. The discourse analysis also draws on the interviews presented in this chapter, as well as the content analysis and the theories outlined in chapter two.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Fairclough's (1995) critical analysis of media discourse is the methodological framework used in analysing five articles printed in the arts section of the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian*. The theoretical grounding is theories of discourse outlined and discussed in chapter two.

I have chosen to analyse one article from each year used in the content analysis, except for two articles from 2000. The articles are selected on the following criteria: they should represent different genres as defined in the content analysis, they should represent different races and genders, they should be written by journalists interviewed for this thesis, they should represent different art-forms, they should be well written and interesting, and they should somehow reflect society of the time. This is the case for four of the five articles. The last article from December 2000 does not fulfil all of these criteria, but is chosen to give an example of a new focus evolving in the arts section of the *Mail&Guardian*. After a presentation of the methodological framework, each article is analysed, starting with 1985 and ending with 2000.

Methodology

According to Fairclough, language is socially shaped as well as socially shaping. Language may reproduce and maintain existing social identities, relations and systems of knowledge, belief or power, but it can also help to transform them (1995: 55). Within this lies Williams' (in Higgins, 1999) notion of language itself being ideology. Language not only reflects society, but forms at the same time part of an ideological shaping of public opinion. Critical discourse analysis as performed by Fairclough insists on equally exploring the socially constitutive and the socially shaped side of language use (1995: 55).

Fairclough divides the analysis into two foci: communicative events and orders of discourse. Analysis of communicative events deals with a particular text, like the articles analysed in this chapter. According to Fairclough, the concern is with continuity and change: "in what ways is this communicative event normative, drawing upon familiar

types and formats, and in what ways is it creative, using old resources in new ways?” (1995: 56). Orders of discourse deal with overall structure and the way it evolves in the context of social and cultural changes (1995: 56). The main concern in this chapter is on communicative events.

Fairclough separates the analysis of the communicative event into three dimensions: the text, the discourse practice and the sociocultural practice. The text level covers linguistic analyses, analysis of vocabulary, semantics and phonology. This thesis is not concerned with a detailed linguistic analysis. Analysis of the text also includes the organisation of sentences or the overall structure of, for example, a newspaper article. Analysis of text is concerned both with meaning and form, which are two interrelated dimensions of the same, since meanings necessarily are realised in form (1995: 57). Questions of who is or is not represented, how, and why, are important to unravel obvious as well as hidden aspects in a text. Other than using the text itself at this stage in the analysis, I employ the results from the content analysis to comment on the type of article and the photograph accompanying it.

Whereas the analysis of the textual or linguistic level is more descriptive, close to what ‘is there’ on paper, analysis of the second dimension, the discourse practice, is far more interpretative: “It is a cultural interpretation in that it locates the particular text within the facet of culture that is constituted by (networks of) orders of discourse” (1995: 61). Fairclough outlines two different processes of the discourse practice, the first being the institutional process, for example editorial procedures involved in media production, and discourse processes, which is the transformation texts undergo in production and consumption. Discourse practice straddles the division between society and culture on the one hand, and discourse, language and text on the other, and operates as the link between the text and the sociocultural practice (1995: 60). I am mainly concerned with the analytical or intertextual side of discourse practice. To analyse the discourse practice, I apply some of the theories elaborated in chapter two in order to scrutinise specific aspects of the different articles. I also use the interviews made with the journalists who wrote the articles, which were discussed in chapter four.

The sociocultural practice or the third dimension caters for the text's immediate context, the wider context of institutional practices, and the yet wider frame of society and culture (1995: 62). Fairclough finds it valuable to differentiate between three important aspects of the sociocultural practice: economic, political (concerned with issues of power and ideology), and cultural (concerned with questions of value and identity) (1995: 62). To examine the context of the texts, I utilise historical and political information, as well as my interviews with the journalists and other textual material written by the journalists and others.

Fairclough introduces many different theoretical terms, which I find more confusing than illuminating. Fairclough's definition above of discourse processes is similar to both his concepts of orders of discourse and discourse practice: "I have in mind particularly the polarity alluded to earlier between broadly conventional and broadly creative *discourse processes*, involving either a normative use of discourse types (genres and discourses) or a creative mixture of them" (1995: 60). I believe this rather should read discourse practice, because later on the same page, he writes: "Creative *discourse practice* can be expected to be relatively complex, in terms of the number of genres and discourses mixed together and the way they are mixed together" (1995: 60) (My italics).

Later, he writes: "I come now to the second of the twin perspectives within a critical discourse analysis of the media, the order of discourse – how it is structured in terms of configurations of genres and discourses, and shifts within the order of discourse and its relationship to other socially adjacent orders of discourse" (1995: 62). Orders of discourse shift within orders of discourse relating to orders of discourse? The sentence appears to be very confusing. Even though I do not find all of Fairclough's terms valuable to use, I still believe that the divide between the text, the discourse practice and the sociocultural practice is a good framework from which to conduct analysis of texts.

For a change, agitprop plus stagecraft

ASINAMALI: Directed by Mbongeni Ngema
Market Theatre

THE vexed question of whether politics makes good art has trailed across the boards in several past productions at the Market and Dhlomo Theatres, and at hundreds of small venues in townships around the country.

Asinamali proves the point again: it can. With notable exceptions, agitprop theatre has often been difficult theatre, accepted from a point of view of political faith, rather than for its value as good theatre.

Mbongeni Ngema clearly knows from experience — particularly in the international hit *Woza Albert* — that form is as essential an ingredient as substance. Not only is *Asinamali* structurally sound, it is impeccably staged and directed.

Without the usual impediments, the message burns with electrifying intensity. But beware, in the small confines of the Market's Laager theatre, of being scorched. *Asinamali* had its debut in larger township venues before larger audiences, where projection was clearly aimed at maximum pitch. Here, the singing, acting and dancing almost overwhelm.



Between hope and confrontation ... *Asinamali*'s Solomzi Bhisolo, Thami Cele, Bheki Mquadi, Bongani Hlophe and Boy Ngema

Take, for instance, the tumble of accusations against the system that end in an interrogation of a hapless member of the audience, unable, in frozen Anglo-Saxon embar-

assment, to make any kind of response.

By contrast, in *Asinamali*'s previous, more open stagings, as Thami Cele explained afterwards, the audience would participate wildly,

giving the answers.

Song and dance, even mime, are part of the tough fabric of this play; a prison cell containing all the characters is the metaphor; the burning township is the theme.

The threads of five personal stories are drawn out and woven together. Together they form the story of a people's struggle against oppression. Injustice, violent confrontation and then hope looms across the stage.

Ngema largely steers away from the ironies that are so often the images used by political artists and instead tells a story pitched at the level of folk history: the murdered hero of the Lamontville rent-increase protests, Msizwe Dube, is one folk icon; another is the tsotsi Bra Tony.

Only towards the end do the individual accounts come toppling over each other and the play loses definition, becoming a little too long.

But for the rest *Asinamali* is strong and vital. In fact it's astounding to see something so relevant, so immediate to the conflagration consuming the townships.

Mike van Niekerk

Joeys gets what she deserves

What Jo'burg didn't get from the visual arts section of the Women's Festival was a women's show — at least not in any sense beyond the merely biological, writes IVOR POWELL

AS one of the principal organisers of the visual arts component of the Women's Festival of the Arts remarked in a gloomy retrospect: "Jo'burg got the show it deserved."

It was a sad thing to have to say; like most people who live in this city, she uses the word Jo'burg as a kind of obscenity. It was an admission that the basically feminist group of which she is a member had lost control.

Essentially, though, what she meant — and, for the semantic record, what the word "Jo'burg" means in general when you screw up your face in saying it — is that somewhere along the line all the ideals that had motivated the organising of the show in the first place had got lost in the cynical realities of its execution.

What Jo'burg got was a series of basically conventional art shows, more or less polite in character, and varying in quality (for what "quality" is worth in a case like this) from the very good to the frankly awful.

What Jo'burg didn't get was a women's show in any sense beyond the merely biological one. An exhibition of women's art is not the same sort of thing as an art exhibition. The rider that is contained in the "women's" directs our attention so that we read the work as much in terms of what it says about the condition of women as we do in terms of its functionalities as art.

In this sense, a women's show is as much an exercise in sociology as it is in aesthetics. What this adds up to is a responsibility on the part of the organisers to coax out of the work those qualities or quirks that are specific to women or speak about the condition of women in this society. A daunting enough task to be sure. Especially in this society.

Anybody who sets up a category that includes everybody from Northern suburbs housewives to traditional Ndebele matrons is taking a large bite of the cultural pie — the kind of bite you can choke on.

Still, if the organisers of the festival had done no more than allow all the wildly disparate versions of the world (reflecting the wildly different circumstances of women in this country) to come into some kind of generative conflict, the whole exercise would have been vindicated.

But the way in which the work has actually been selected and organised leaves it sociologically mute. Of course, there was no selection as such. Everything (down to the last Impressionist landscape) that was submitted was actually exhibited, but — and here's the rub — not in the same place and not with the same kind of status accorded.

Had a single large space been available, perhaps some of these problems would have been avoided. I doubt it, though: the real problems, as I understand them, were structural, tied up with the way in which the whole festival came into being, and not merely circumstantial.

The sad and paradoxical (but not unpredict-



Festival organisers get together ... democracy in art for a city that defies both democracy and art

able) thing is that the Women's Festival went wrong for all the right reasons.

It was because the feminist core group refused to prescribe policy and instead relied on the democratic process to evolve it that the show became undemocratic in the first place; it was because the core group refused to be exclusive from the outset that the problems of exclusivity arose.

This part of the story is only too familiar to anybody who has ever tried to organise anything in this city. This is the part where the relatively well-known artists discover powerful — and somehow "moral" — reasons why they cannot possibly have their work hung alongside that of people who have never exhibited before.

This is the part where the Sunday Painters Association announces that it wants to disassociate itself publicly from the Artists in the Sun. Where the Left-Handed Vegetarians find that they have absolutely irreconcilable differences from the Left-Handed Marxist Vegetarians ... etc. Sis! But it happens every time.

So, the more people were involved — the broader, that is to say, the democracy — the more the prejudices multiplied, and the more difficult it became to keep everybody happy, or at least in their respective corners of the ring.

Enter - in nasty parenthesis — Women for Peace ("those white ladies who drive into Soweto in their BMW's and plant pumpkins all over your garden", as one Black ex-participant described them). Exit, through the other side of the revolving door, a significant number of black participants — presumably having had enough pumpkins, however dis-

guised, to constipate them for life.

But the show went on and the Impressionist landscapes poured in...

Finally, the following selection procedure was agreed upon: particular individuals would be delegated to organise, in consultation with the relevant gallery owners or curators, particular and more or less thematically based exhibitions.

Predictably enough this led to disaster. The average gallery person is not terribly concerned with issues like feminism or the finer points of "authenticity". What the average gallery person really cares about is "quality" — which, with one or two exceptions, is little more than a euphemism for sales. Moreover, in order to maintain standards of quality — interpreted as above — he or she usually reserves the right of final selection.

The participation of the galleries in the selection process meant (to cut a long story short) that the various galleries got what they wanted — those works that conformed to their particular standards of quality of saleability.

The Market Gallery got an exhibition that looked like nothing so much as an exhibition at the Market.

Natalie Knight got the earthy fabrics and helped them along with — for God's sake! — a fashion show. And so on down the line.

Until we get to Rayda Becker's garage which — in a rather alarming conspiracy of circumstance and metaphor (since this particular show was originally scheduled for somewhere else) — got basically everything that was left over. The fact that this was one of the very few shows that actually had anything to say about women's experience is therefore largely fortuitous and to nobody's credit.

It would be easy enough to moralise over

this sordid little tale of bad faith and worse judgement. To apportion blame is, however, a lot more difficult.

That the galleries should be operating within a marketplace is neither surprising nor culpable. That democracy is a system that as often as not breeds its opposite is a thought that is at least as old as Plato.

The real pity though is that the work on exhibition was capable of saying so much more than it was allowed to say. A painting by Ilona Anderson next to the kind of illustration that you find in *Fair Lady* magazine says something that Ilona Anderson alone cannot say.

When you put the two together you can begin to understand where the savagery and the humour of Ilona Anderson's picturings of sexual relations come from and what they rest upon. At the same time the *Fair Lady* illustration begins to wear its pastel romances like an aging tart her face-power.

If you put one of Helen Sebide's images of black rural life next to one of those Pageview-as-Montmartre banalities that litter our public museums, you are likely to find in that play-off some real insight into the nature of cultural alienation in this country, and at the same time into the possibilities of transcendence.

The point here is not one of making some of the work shine at the expense of the rest (although I think this would, in many cases, be the inevitable result) but rather one of bringing out latencies of meaning in all of it.

By means of systematic confrontations of this kind it will be possible to make pointed those things that would not be apparent so long as the work is seen only in the polite context of art.

1985: Fine art as politics

The article “Joeys gets what she deserves”, which appeared in the very first issue of the *Weekly Mail* June 14 1985, was the first newspaper article art historian Ivor Powell wrote. The article is a critique of the visual arts section of the Women’s Festival held in Johannesburg at the time.

The article falls within the category of classic-reviews³⁶ in that it gives a straightforward description and evaluation of the art exhibition. The article represents the most typical genre in the arts section of the *Weekly Mail* in 1985, constituting 53 per cent of all articles. It is a genre that was to have a steady decrease, until reaching a low in 2000 of only 17 per cent. The photograph of white women accompanying the article was as rare then as it is in 2000. In 1985 only 15 per cent of all the pictures in the arts section were of white women, with 1 per cent increase to 16 per cent in 2000.

Powell starts with outlining what the article is about, continues with a long criticism of what went wrong with the women’s art exhibition, and ends with stating what might have made the exhibition interesting. Even though its outline or frame is a classic-review, the article has feature elements adding sarcasm and humour in a more narrative style:

Enter – in nasty parenthesis – Women for Peace (“those white ladies who drive into Soweto in their BMW’s and plant pumpkins all over your garden”, as one Black ex-participant described them). Exit, through the other side of the revolving door, a significant number of black participants – presumably having enough pumpkins, however disguised, to constipate them for life. But the show went on and Impressionist landscapes poured in... (The *Weekly Mail*, June 14 1985)

This is the part where the Sunday Painters Association announces that it wants to dissociate itself publically from the Artists in the Sun. Where the Left-Handed Vegetarians find they have absolutely irreconcilable differences from the Left-Handed Marxist Vegetarians...etc. Sis! But it happens every time (The *Weekly Mail*, June 14 1985).

This analysis builds on my claim that Ivor Powell situates the women's arts exhibition within the political discourse of the South African apartheid system, and this system's effects on art in South Africa. He criticises the organisers for not considering these facts. The criticism is not only about the organisers' failure to address women's issues in general, but also about their failure to address the contrariety of women's situations in this country, differences resulting from the racist regime. The exhibition neglects to make a cultural counter-hegemonic statement, and is therefore a failure. The exhibition cannot be only about art:

An exhibition of women's art is not the same sort of thing as an art exhibition. The rider that is contained in the word "women's" directs our attention so that we read the work as much in terms of what it says about the condition of women as we do in terms of its functionings as art. In this sense, a women's show is as much an exercise in sociology as it is in aesthetics (*The Weekly Mail*, June 14 1985).

Analysing the text-level, it is noticeable that although the article is politically loaded, Powell writes neither the words 'politics' nor 'apartheid'. Still, he manages to emphasise these aspects clearly through sarcasm (as exemplified above), short phrases, binary oppositions and repetitiveness.

Through phrases like "the cultural alienation in this country", "the different versions of the world" and "the conditions of women in this society" (*The Weekly Mail*, June 14 1985), Powell addresses the political aspects the art exhibition forms a part of without writing 'apartheid'. The phrases allude to the cultural struggle against apartheid, the different political views, that is pro and con apartheid, and the different situations of women in society, both in general terms and as a result of the political situation. The emphasis of binary oppositions such as 'black-white', 'democratic-undemocratic', 'exclusive-not exclusive', 'gallery-garage' and 'Northern suburb housewives-traditional Ndebele matrons' produce a clear atmosphere of stringent opposites that the exhibition, according to Powell, did not manage to unite or make use of. The word 'democratic'

³⁶ For a further elaboration and definition of the genres and photographic categories, see chapter three.

appears four times, the word 'moral' twice, once in quotes, and the word 'quality' six times, of which two are in quotes. These repetitions could indicate what Powell thinks the art exhibition should have been about: not quality according to sales, which was the result after the objects were spread in different galleries, but quality in relation to democracy and morality, quality according to new possible meanings arising out of doing away with the apartheid veil between black and white art.

It is obvious that Powell disdains the period in art history in the late 19th and early 20th century called Impressionism³⁷, also used as a general describing of a kind of non-figurative style in landscape painting. It seems that Powell does not allude to the historic period, but rather uses the term derogatorily as a name for 'polite' art. In the article, there is an insinuated link between an un- or a-political attitude (or worse, a racist attitude), Northern suburb housewives and Impressionism. The first time it is mentioned, Powell writes that all works of art were accepted, and in parenthesis "down to the last Impressionist landscape" (*The Weekly Mail*, June 14 1985). The second time, after ridiculing white Women for Peace driving their BMWs in Soweto (see paragraph above): "But the show went on and the Impressionist landscapes poured in..." (*The Weekly Mail*, June 14 1985). And finally, in a last sarcasm: "Pageview-as-Montmartre banalities that litter our public museums" (*The Weekly Mail*, June 14 1985). It is worth quoting the whole paragraph the last extract is taken from, because it indicates the core of how Powell believes the exhibition should have been carried out:

If you put one of the Helen Sebide's images of black rural life next to one of those Pageview-as-Montmartre banalities that litter our public museums, you are likely to find in that play-off some real insight into the nature of cultural alienation in this country, and at the same time into the possibilities of transcendence (*The Weekly Mail*, June 14 1985).

³⁷ The dictionary defines Impressionism as "a style of painting that developed in France between 1870 and 1900. Artists who used this style often concentrated on showing the effects of moving light on their subjects, and painted vague shapes with blurred edges rather than neat realistic details of a scene" (Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary, London and Glasgow: Collins, 1990).

On the discourse practice level, this text forms part of two distinct orders of discourse; the role of arts in society, and politics. In a democratic society, the two orders of discourse intertwine in that the arts often are dependent on public funding, art is often owned by state institutions or large influential companies. In the undemocratic South African society of 1985 the arts were politically loaded in a different way; they either played the role of expressing the 'civilisation' of the cultural hegemony, or they were used in the struggle to fight this very hegemony³⁸. It is this conflict that is the base of Powell's article.

The use of Greimas' (1968) semiotic square as elaborated by Clifford (1995)³⁹, could help to define the colliding interests of different artistic expressions, and the urge to push, redefine or remove boundaries between them, which is an obvious urge expressed by Powell in the article. In the left zone of the square, the zone of original, singular art, the zone of the masterpiece, the art museum and the art market, "Impressionist landscapes" (*The Weekly Mail*, June 14 1985) are located, placed by the South African cultural hegemony of 1985. In zone two, the zone of traditional and collective culture, history, the artefact, and the ethnographic museum is "Helen Sebide's images of black rural life" (*The Weekly Mail*, June 14 1985) situated by the same apartheid hegemony.

As Clifford states, the traffic between the two zones has been frequent in the 20th century (1995: 57), and it is a traffic urged by Powell, but not, in his opinion, by the organising committee of the Women's exhibition. In the article, Powell wants to move the culture of zone two to the art of zone one, exactly by the means explained by Clifford, of placing the art in an art gallery. Powell metaphorically moves the 'Impressionist' zone one of fine art by the use of sarcasm to zone three and four, consisting of not-art, fakes, inventions and anti-art. Powell criticises the organisers of the women's art exhibition of not finding one exhibition space for all the works of art. That could have envisaged new meanings both in the art of the European tradition and the so-called traditional African art. Instead, the reality of the exhibition is that this kind of art ended up in "Rayda Becker's garage"

³⁸ See chapter four for a further discussion of the relation between art and politics. See also the transcriptions of the interviews in the appendix, particularly with Charlotte Bauer and Ivor Powell.

(The *Weekly Mail*, June 14 1985). According to Powell, it was this garage-exhibition, ironically enough, that “was one of the very few shows that actually had anything to say about women’s experience” (The *Weekly Mail*, June 14 1985).

A reply to Powell’s article written by Karen Harber, one of the organisers of the Women’s festival, forms part of the sociocultural practice of the article. It was printed the following week in the arts section of the *Weekly Mail* titled “Stereotypes of what women ought to be” (The *Weekly Mail*, June 21 to 27 1985). It appears from the response that the festival never had the intention of operating within the political discourse Powell attributes to it. Nevertheless, Harber’s explanation of what the festival was meant to be fails to say anything else than what Powell stated. In one paragraph, Harber self-contradictory states: “Although the festival was run according to feminist principles” and continues the sentence with “the intention was not to make a feminist statement” (The *Weekly Mail*, June 21 to 27 1985). This explains nothing. What are feminist principles if they are not based on feminist statements? She continues: “nor to project a sisterhood. The concern was not with raising women’s experiences to heroic proportions (romantic concept)” (The *Weekly Mail*, June 21 to 27 1985), insinuating that Powell meant they should have. It is not possible to find these assumptions in Powell’s article. Harber ends the sentence and the paragraph with “but [the concern was] rather to raise questions concerning women and art in this country” (The *Weekly Mail*, June 21 to 27 1985). That is exactly what Powell accuses them of failing to do in an adequate manner. Harber continues to confirm the validity of Powell’s criticism by posing questions the festival apparently wanted to raise in a manner clearly influenced by European conceptions art: “The festival raised important questions. Why is it so difficult to find black women painters or sculptors? What is the relevance of traditional art?” (The *Weekly Mail*, June 21 to 27 1985). By mentioning the race only of the black artists, by asking about the relevance of traditional art, but not of painting (as Powell does), the organising committee, if Harber represents them, was overtly biased in their view of what the important issues in the arts were.

³⁹ For a layout and closer scrutiny of the semiotic square, see chapter three, page 21.

When scrutinising the broader political and sociocultural practice of the article, it becomes clear that Powell's interest in the political aspects of art in the apartheid era was not new when he wrote the article in the *Weekly Mail*. Two months earlier Powell published the article "Killing the father: Some thoughts on South African art and the BMW show" in the magazine *De Arte* (Powell, April 1985). The article is a critique of an innovative art exhibition at the time named *Tributaries*. At the exhibition organised by Ricky Burnett, a Ndebele doll was exhibited next to a sculpture by Bruce Arnott, and Powell makes an excellent claim as to why this is a valuable and enriching juxtaposition. The Ndebele doll is removed from 'ethnological objects'; the Arnott sculpture is removed from 'Western traditions'. Thus, both works of art stand as if they were naked, democratised and demystified:

It forces us to come to terms with the so-called ethnological object in a way that the ethnological context was specifically designed to avoid. We start to read the object in terms of traces of *human* consciousness that it manifests, not as a remote specimen pertaining to what it seen essentially as a different species. At the same time the traditional Western art-object is demystified. It loses or begins to lose the support system – even in some cases, the oxygen tent – that the theoretical context of Western art normally provides. While this is happening it starts to show some of its sociological and anthropological seams (Powell, *De Arte*, April 1985: 46).

In this article Powell criticises the belief that Western art criticism has the answer to what 'real art' is. According to Powell, "the Western tradition can only be experienced as a burden; it becomes, precisely, a standard rather than an environment – and a standard that by existing at all, guarantees its own elusiveness" (*De Arte*, April 1985: 45). These opinions are supported in the series of three articles by Powell titled "The art of being black" (*Work in Progress*, March, April and May 1993), and confirmed in the interview with me. In the interview, Powell attacks what he saw as the dominant view of the apartheid regime:

Culture was what the whites had... Art belonged to the whites and to the European tradition. And that [art] was our membership with

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ARTS

film • theatre • music
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A few free-spirited females on video shelves

By CLAUDIA SCHADEBERG

IT'S a dangerous world negotiating oneself round video stores these days with all those lurid covers staring you in the face. About 70 videos emerge on the market every month of which a small percentage deserve closer scrutiny.

The following videos were above average and they all happen to feature strong willed women in leading roles.

The movie *Punchlines* stars Sally Field as a determined New Jersey housewife who seeks personal fulfilment via a part-time career as a stand-up comic. The slightly seedy and compulsive world of amateur entertainers is explored with a well cast gallery of Follies-like characters.

Field's attempt to juggle her domestic life with her other career makes for some comic moments. In one scene with her despairing husband she asks: "What do you want?" whereupon he lectures her about being a good wife ... but they are at cross purposes. "What do you want for

dinner?" she replies.

Tom Hanks plays the part of another aspiring entertainer but his neurosis highlights Field's inner strength.

In the strangest and blakiest of black comedies called *Easy Wheels*, women again seek fulfilment of sorts. The anti-heroine is a leather-clad bike girl whose mission is to raise a new generation of free-spirited females who are born to crush any male competition. It's a send-up of all those macho movies portraying women bikers as gum chewing, unappetising and aggressive misfits.

A free-spirited woman is the pivot of movie *Cold Sassy Tree*. Faye Dunaway stars as the warm, witty and spontaneous woman who challenges the hypocrisies of a sleepy town in the deep South. Her marriage to an elderly widower rejuvi-

nates her partner and sets a pace for change. It's a well constructed and uplifting movie.

A manipulative and snobbish hostess plans an elaborate dinner party which goes wrong in the witty movie *Dinner at Eight*. Marsha Mason gives a superlative performance as the highly strung hostess whose carefully laid plans end in disaster, including the demise of a carefully constructed aspic dish in the shape of a lion which ends up a messy heap. Based on a 1930s stage play it's a comedy of manners which does not date.

A must for any discerning video viewer is the spoof 1950s movie *Hairspray*. A bubbly plump teenager with an amazing two tone bouffant hairdo fulfils her dream of appearing on a popular TV rock n' roll show called the "Corny Collins Show". Great character roles include her blowsy protective mother played by the amazing "Divine".

A Far Cry from the old South Africa?

Author Mary Benson was banned in the 1960s and left the country. Now she is back for a visit. Her reaction to the South Africa of 1990 is hopeful despite a restrictive visa. By PAT SCHWARTZ

"THE train hurtled into action, leaving Mafeking, leaving my country." The final words in Mary Benson's lyrical autobiography *A Far Cry* cannot but linger in the consciousness of those to whom South Africa is home.

When she wrote them, she was not at all certain under what circumstances, if ever, she was likely to see her country again.

Now she is back on a visit and her words, once banned, may again be heard and read, though the restrictive terms of her visa still prevent her from reporting on her experiences in the newish South Africa of 1990.

Benson is a woman to whom people matter. She cares about the millions she will never meet, the many whose lives she has touched and the few who have influenced and changed the course of her own life.

It is extraordinary that this gentle, non-judgemental and warmly beautiful woman with the twinkle in her blue eyes and a great talent for enjoyment could have been considered a threat to the country she cares for so passionately. But it was probably that passion that so alarmed the Verwoerdian government which saw fit, through banning and house arrest, to drive into exile a voice and a spirit which could not be silenced.

Now she is home, for a while, meeting friends whom she left incarcerated, restricted, silenced. She sees the changes — good and bad.

Downtown Johannesburg transformed into a black city; new and ugly buildings dominating the skyline; people relaxing in parks who once entered them only to water and weed; people in positions in businesses they could once never have aspired to; the horrors of KTC and Fort Elizabeth's Red Location; the graves in Cradock of four outstanding young leaders whose assassins still roam free; the pall of smog over Soweto; the ludicrous juxtaposition of plush Sandton and pitiful Alexandra.

For Benson being back is receiving a warm hug of welcome from a total stranger and the excitement of the *Groote Schuur* press conference: "It was extraordinarily thrilling to feel one was back in this country at this moment in its history. I was rather sceptical before the press conference though I felt it was terribly important to remain positive and not be cynical and to try to work towards the objectives which Mandela and the others had worked towards for so long."

But being back is also having the visa restriction — "such a throw-back to the past at a time when one is feeling the exhilaration of the changes".

Benson has spent much of her adult life abroad. She first left South Africa to pursue a dream of Hollywood. As unaware of politics and discrimination as most other young white South Africans, her role models were filmstars rather than political activists.

What changed her was the influence of two men: author Alan Paton, whose *Cry the Beloved Country* made her take a new look at her homeland, and priest Michael Scott with whom she worked for many years in his crusade against oppression and human misery.

It was Scott who made her conscious of the responsibility of being born in South Africa of South African parents (her roots go back to the 1820 Settlers).

Still, a variety of circumstances meant that she spent most of the 50s abroad and then found herself in the 60s "coming back more



Actor Sam Williams ... 'The ape that I portray has given me a deeper look at the problems that assail and bedevil humanity'

By DON MATTERA

SAM WILLIAMS turned his back on the stage a few years ago — after a brush with a progressive producer.

He was playing three parts in a production of *The Merchant of Venice* when he had a furious argument with the producer over the issue of equal pay for equal acting. Williams quit in disgust and turned his back on the stage for ten years.

Now he's back — as an ape. It took this role in *Report to the Academy* (now on at the Trust Bank Arena, Windybrow) "to restore my faith in theatre folk". In an interview this week, he said he was not a bitter, as "a man cannot live on bitterness alone".

It is a challenging role — one of so many that this multi-talented man has played in his long career. It spans more than 40 films made in the esteemed company of the late Trevor Howard, Christopher Lee and Richard Roundtree, to name a few.

The soul of the actor as an ape

"I died so many times in my roles, I've come to understand the irrepressibility of human endeavour. I see it daily in the faces and hands of black washerwomen, street-diggers, and in other ordinary folk whose names never make the headlines." Sam is serious when his deep, almost American drawl utters those words.

Knysna was the place of his nativity, and where he took his wife Belle and had his children, whom he named Love, Peace, Freedom and Wisdom, to show them his "roots".

A trained school teacher — not the doctor his sa-

cerdotal dad wanted him to become — Sam Williams performed *Othello*. From Shakespeare to the ghetto: Sam's portrayal of *The Bat* in the much-vaunted — then aborted — *Phiri, The Musical*, was in his own words "the best part I ever played".

As an avid funeral undertaker, under Barney Simon's direction, Sam Williams earned the title of "chameleon". Anthony Quinn has also been lauded by that epithet.

The man has come a long way: Knysna to Cape Town; and Johannesburg's Dark City (Alexandra township) to the teeming streets of Koffi-Sophiatown and Soweto, and finally to Eldorado Park.

"The ape that I portray (adapted and directed by Mario Schiess) has given me a deeper look at the universal problems that assail and bedevil humanity. Marius Weyers truly did justice to the part," he said.

Drumming up a message deeper than Africa

From African ancestors to Eastern mysticism ... Smiler Makama's music reflects as many contrasts as his beliefs.

By LEON MABER

THE deep, pulsating rhythm of Burning Spear's "easy" reggae, caught live on video in Paris, seems at variance with the shrine to Hare Krishna at the far end of the room. Smiler Makama — dreadlocked, imposing — reclines in an armchair, surrounded by indigenous African musical instruments. He is leader of Afro-ethnic group, Azumah, and builds the group's instruments himself.

The band provided the music for *Ipi Tombi II* — *The Now Generation* which disappeared prematurely from local theatre. Makama hopes the cast will be overseas before the year's end.

The show recently re-opened in Vosloorus to a small audience.

It is Makama's dream to play to an international audience; he feels Azumah deserves a shot at success. The group's first fling with music for theatre ended when *Ipi Tombi II* closed last year after a copyright wrangle. Azumah has only one album release but has got some music on celluloid — their first movie break came with *Hold My Hand, I'm Dying*.

"*Ipi Tombi* was never really closed," Makama says firmly. "I think the time would have been right for the cast to cross over now."

Should things not work out with the show, he would love to see Azumah getting to Europe under their own steam.

"It seems to me there are more fans for Afri-

can music in Europe than in Africa. People are just waiting to acclaim us because we are international in our thinking. We carry the real music, the true message. We need to maintain the original structure of African rhythm, which is an international sound."

Carrying the "real music", though, is no easy task. "I meet good guys walking the street; they don't know what to do. There are so many guys fighting but it's the studios that build the stars. I've heard reggae better than Lucky Dube's but it's never been marketed."

Yet Azumah does have something to fall back on. The group's second album is due for release by Tusk Music.

Makama arrived in Johannesburg four years ago from Swaziland, where he spearheaded a mini-music revolution as leader of Afro-rhythm group, Calabash, in the late 1970s. He was feted by indigenous musicians in South Africa for his creation of the *smilerphone* — a cross between a piano and a marimba. His first appearance in Jo'burg was at the invitation of Azu-

mah — then an unknown quantity.

Although he is a part of the 10-member group, he is also keen to do solo work. "For me, working with Azumah is a continuation of the work I did with Calabash but I'd still like to take some time off to do some arranging — have fun with the people," he adds.

At 29, he feels he would also like to slow down — eventually give up touring and stop playing live. The thought of returning to Swaziland has been entertained.

"I'd like to retire to some arts centre there, teach the youth cultural and spiritual things."

Makama is an outspoken figure of contrasts and contradictions, never more pronounced than in his welding together of Rastafarianism, Eastern mysticism and African ancestral belief.

"When I play, I'm constantly aware of the significance of the drums. I believe in my ancestors, although deeper than being an African, I'm also a spirit. I keep a Rasta image because I believe it has God-consciousness in it. I think it's God's way of bringing black people back to him. I'm a student of the Veda because the belief in reincarnation is synonymous with African traditional belief.

"Hey, I'm not against modern technology. It's just that I'm aware of my culture. I believe the two can live in harmony."

Like his varied beliefs, perhaps?

THE WEEK ON THE BOX

The weather report: whither now?

IN the light of the new climate certain politicians keep reminding us we're currently basking in, isn't it time *The Weather* changed too?

For instance, as the political cold front hots up — hopefully not solely because of the Greenhouse Effect — its language is beginning to cool down to a series of more manageable syllables. In nightly news reports, "ANC terrorists" are becoming "ANC cadres", "mindless violence" is turning into "armed struggle" and everyone calls Joe Slovo "Mr".

The weather report, however, remains an almost complete mystery. I'll give R50 and my M-Net decoder to the first person other than an SABC meteorologist and his or her immediate family who can tell me what the hell "anti-cyclonic circulation" means. My guess is that it means we're not all going to be killed by a rogue cyclone in the next 24 hours. But I somehow don't think this is right.

Then there are the low pressure systems, dissipating fronts, onshore airflows and of course the dear old troughs to contend with. And all this activity takes place on a thing called a synoptic chart which looks quite a lot like an ultra-sonic photograph of a pregnant womb.

If, when Graham Hart points his little stick at this chart and tells us we can expect a "high pressure system to dominate in the Transvaal", he thereby means we can expect warm, sunny weather, why doesn't he say so?

All most people want to know is what to wear to work in the morning and whether they'll need swimming trunks and goggles if they have to stand too long at the bus stop. Predictions of a gale-force wind might cause half Johannesburg's secretaries to reschedule their hair appointments, as news of an approaching heatwave may inspire thousands of executives to take their seersucker suits to the dry-cleaners.

The only good reasons for having weather reports at all are practical ones: Will little Leonard get pneumonia and die if we send him off to school in that Airtex shirt? Will grandma dehydrate if she wears her woolly vest to Durban this weekend? Is there any point in calling the office and telling them I've got Aids and going to the beach instead?

The weather reports do, eventually, get around to giving us a quick, idiot's appraisal of whether to expect rain or shine, catastrophe or clemency, but only after we've been subjected to Headmaster Hart's dreary lecture about seething inter-stellar pressure points. Tiresome, esoteric telly-reports about the weather are no more interesting than the kind of people who like to talk about it in supermarket queues.

Speaking of the weather, TVI's transmission of the American Earth Day Special was spectacular. Starring such screen giants as Dustin Hoffman, Danny DeVito and Tweety Bird, the hour-and-a-half-long exploration of why the earth is dying and what we can do to earn a remission, was simplistic, informative and entertaining.

Who but the Americans could represent Mother Earth as a patient in intensive care and cast Bette Midler, burdened by a head-dress of old tin cans and ticker tape, to play her? Who but the Americans would think of using ET, a creature constructed entirely from non-biodegradable plastic, to urge the nation to get into recycling? Who?

Terrifically vulgar (without being the least bit tacky), sometimes witty, frequently childish and occasionally ironic, it was pure showbiz — and it worked.

In days when few people read books, write letters or go to meetings, the small screen has become our crystal ball. I'm beginning to think it's just conceivable that if the world is to be saved at all, it'll be an all-star song and dance routine that clinches it. Rescue will look like Roger Rabbit.



Television
Charlotte Bauer

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CLASSICAL MUSIC

Celebrating Copland

AARON COPLAND — *Fanfare for the Common Man, Appalachian Spring, Rodeo and Old American Songs*; William Warfield (baritone), London and Columbia Symphony Orchestras, Aaron Copland (conductor) (CD: CBS Masterworks MK 42430)

AARON COPLAND — *Appalachian Spring* (original version), *Lincoln Portrait* and *Billy the Kid*; Henry Fonda (narrator), London Symphony Orchestra, Aaron Copland (conductor) (CD: CBS Masterworks MK 42431)

TO celebrate the ninetieth birthday of Aaron Copland, by many regarded as the most important American composer of this century, CBS has decided to issue their successful "Copland conducts Copland" series on compact disc.

The transfer to the new medium brings a new clarity and intensity to the recorded sound, in this way enhancing the finely woven textures of Copland's writing.

The centrepiece of both discs reviewed here is *Appalachian Spring*, originally commissioned for the Martha Graham Dance Company. Because of the limited space of the concert hall where it was first performed, the piece was initially scored only for 13 instruments. Subsequently Copland extracted a suite from the ballet, which version acquired a life of its own.

It is sheer excess to have both versions available in performances conducted by the composer.

But what glorious excess! The chamber version is perhaps more in keeping with the simple revivalist theme of the original ballet. The musical writing is at once transparent



DisConnection
COENRAAD VISSER

and taut, and one can but marvel at the ingenuity of the orchestration.

Even to the more lavishly scored version Copland brings a sense of freshness and purity; again perfectly in line with the theme of the ballet.

The other gem here is the inventive *Old American Songs*, gathered by Copland from sources including the original song sheets of hymns and minstrel songs. (*Simple Gifts*, the haunting

Shaker song, also appears in *Appalachian Spring*.)

The songs are convincingly sung by baritone William Warfield whose singing is richly idiomatic, if not as infectious as that of Sierrill Milnes (Telarc). But in the boisterous *I Bought Me a Cat*, Milnes is unsurpassed.

The other ballet pieces, the four dance episodes from *Rodeo* and *Billy the Kid*, are performed with verve. The *Fanfare for the Common Man* is a trifle bland and under-characterised, but again draws its strength from Copland's refusal, as conductor, to take the easy option of brassiness.

The only real disappointment is the *Lincoln Portrait*, marred by Henry Fonda's mannered narration. But then one has been spoiled by Katherine Hepburn (Telarc), whose tremulous voice is most remarkable for its ability to convey the emotional intensity beneath the surface of the considered words.

Some composers are best kept away from conducting their own works. Not so with Copland; these performances are the standard by which others will always be judged.

ARTS

Tshomela's velvet voice brings back memories

The swing years came back to Kippies in a shining appearance by old time jazz and blues artist Donald Tshomela, but it's been a long and rocky road. PHIL MOLEFE reports.

WHEN big South African vocal jazz groups faded from the music scene in the early 1960s many artists decided to go solo.

Jazz and blues artist Donald Tshomela is one of few who prevailed. His recent appearance at the Market Theatre's Kippies Bar gave patrons a taste of music from the 1950s and early 1960s.

Tshomela was a shining star during those "swing years", which boasted big names like the Manhattan's Dolly Rathebe and Miriam Makeba, South Africa's "queen of blues" Emily Kunene, Woodwoodpackers' Victor Ndililwane, Mabel Mafuya, Dorothy Masuku and Ben "Satch" Masinga.

He survived the repression in the 1960s when black artists were forbidden from performing before white audiences and is still thrilling music-lovers today.

His velvet voice filled the tiny venue. He sang Nancy Jacobs' *Hare yeng ko Meadowlands* (a song about forced removals in the 1950s from Sophiatown to Meadowlands), Henry Duke Jorha's composition *Ntyilo Ntyilo*; Peter Chapman's *Every day I have the Blues* and *God Bless the Child* by Billie Holiday.

Bra Don, as the Cape Town-based singer is affectionately known, has been humming and singing the blues since childhood; he started playing professionally in 1951.

He "discovered" Abdullah Ibrahim (Dollar Brand), and played with the late alto saxophonist Kippie Moeketsi and other big names in Cape Town.

He had a rough time there, turning to boxing when his band folded in 1954. He was detained for seven months for participating in the Pan Africanist Congress-organised protest march from Langa to Caledon Square a few days after Sharpeville.

He started singing with The Streamline Brothers, which he formed in 1951 and played with Kholisile Vumazonke, Sonnyboy Mohlale and Joe Ngonyana accompanied by piano.

"We had shows everywhere and just when things were shaping up well for us our pianist left the group," he said in an interview after his Kippies show.

He recalled how worried he was having to take the stage without a pianist.

While preparing for the next show (in Kensington) Tshomela was told of someone around Kensington who could play piano.

"The guy they brought was so thin I doubted he could last. And do you know who that guy was?" he asked. "It was Dollar Brand".

"There was not enough time to rehearse but he immediately fell into our pattern. He was so beautiful, I mean he was just great.

"We wowed the crowd that night when we played Tommy Dorsey's *Honey Dripper* and *Pretty Eyed Baby* by Laverne Baker.



Making music ... Donald Tshomela

"From that time Dollar became a fulltime member and never went back to his old band."

Tshomela's story is confirmed by notes on Brand's first American album *Duke Ellington introduces Dollar Brand*, where it is said that the Streamline Brothers was the first band where Dollar encountered jazz.

"We became one of the best vocal groups in Cape Town.

"The place was fertile with talent at the time and we had groups like Sentimental Maniacs Norman Ntshinga and Dorothy Masuku bands, Tex Kulate's Cups and Saucers, the Merry makers and Honolulu Swingsters," he recalled.

"Every weekend was a jamboree, a big jam feast, and we filled venues like Clyde Street District Six, East York Hall and the Langa Civic Hall."

Tshomela's band split up, and when the Manhattans toured the Cape, Brand teamed up with Moeketsi to back the vocal group.

"Dollar became very close to Kippie and we lost him when he toured the country with the Manhattans. Well, it was good for music having those good voices like Miriam Makeba, Nathan Mdllele and Joe Mkgotsi.

As a boxer Tshomela campaigned in the lightweight division but was soon without a career when he was stripped of his fighting licence for assaulting a white boxer during a sparring session.

It turned out better when Brand persuaded him to return to singing in late 1955.

"In 1956 I teamed up with Dollar, John Gertze on bass, Makhaya Ntshoko on drums and Frank Sithole on penny whistle and vocal. I decided to stay solo from that time onwards."

He says the good times of jazz extended to 1964 when the government started clamping down on anything with whites, coloureds and blacks.

Many artists left, Tshomela stayed, struggled to get jobs and did some jazz cabaret around Cape Town.

Those who left may be coming back and he said he is looking forward to a reunion.

I wanted to stay, but I had to leave

●From PAGE 23

and more when quite a lot of people were coming away".

Ironically, it was just as she was feeling settled and wanting to stay that house arrest and banning orders forced her out once again. "So many people, including people in the thick of it, felt it would be more useful abroad."

It was not easy and "there were times when the longing to be back was overwhelming" but, typically, Benson never gave in and now, can say with obvious pleasure that "I have had an extraordinary life since then, in America and Britain, and I feel that in the end it all worked out."

Though she is an intensely political person, Benson has never espoused a particular ideology.

"I suppose its a weakness in one way but I choose to see it as a strength that I've always been a non-joiner and have become increasingly sceptical of religious and political dogma," she says.

What has kept her going is "other people" — people she has met in person and people she has met through her voracious reading. What attracts her is energy.

Critics of her autobiography have accused her of creating heroes. That upsets her. But it does not stop her from giving credit to those who

have influenced her.

She also feels "a great affinity for great grandfather Tom Stubbs ... a typical settler. I understand the historical anger of blacks against those settlers but when you read of their own sufferings you can't help sympathising with what they went through when they were dumped as a human barrier."

During her weeks in South Africa, Benson has retraced many footsteps, gathering up threads of her past and weaving them into the fabric of her present.

What of the future? For South Africa, she focuses to crystal-gaze. For herself she is uncertain.

Perhaps she will continue with her work on book about her year in New York in 1969. But then again, perhaps her experiences in the past few months will demand to be expressed.

Perhaps she needs to consolidate for "maybe I am aware, despite not feeling 70, of things coming to an end".

One hopes not. As long as Benson retains her energy, her determination and her enviable enthusiasm there will always be new beginnings.

A Far Cry, The Making of a South African published by Penguin.

the sort of 'civilised' world. (...) On the other hand, you had everything that black people did, well they were crafts and curios and so on (Interview, 2000).

Through scrutinising the text, the discourse practice and the sociocultural practice of Powell's article, I have established reasons to suggest that Powell's critique of the Women's exhibition was far more than a critique against the organisers for not making a feminist statement. It was just as much a critique about the lack of acknowledgement of so-called traditional art in South Africa as a result of colonialism and apartheid, and that the Women's exhibition failed to adequately address these issues.

1990: The exiled artist

The article "A Far Cry from the old South Africa?" by Pat Schwartz was printed in the *Weekly Mail*, May 11 to 17 1990. The article is an interview with the exiled South African author Mary Benson who was visiting South Africa for the first time since she left in the 1960s.

Interviews have never constituted a large part of the articles in the arts section of the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian*. It is also the most stable genre in the sense that the percentage has been more or less the same through all the years. In 1990 interviews constituted a total of 14 per cent of all articles in the arts section, in 2000 the percentage was exactly the same.

Even though the article is based on an interview, there are several elements from the feature genre in the article. Schwartz is playing with the fact that Benson is an author. She begins with quoting Benson's autobiography: "THE train lurched into action, leaving Mafeking, leaving my country" (The *Weekly Mail*, May 11 to 17 1990). This intertextual reference situates Benson as an author, but an exiled author. Schwartz fits the form, that is the journalistic article, to the content by writing in quite a poetic language. Throughout the article, she uses lyrical features in structuring sentences describing Benson's first visit in 30 years: "Now she is home, for a while, meeting friends whom she left incarcerated,

restricted, silenced. She sees the changes – good and bad” (The *Weekly Mail*, May 11 to 17 1990).

I suggest that it is a particular historic background that encouraged Schwartz to write this article. South Africa was in 1990 moving towards a new discourse within which the press also was to play a new role. It is against this background that Schwartz makes use of an ideologically loaded language to paint a rather heroic portrait of her interviewee Mary Benson.

On the text-level, one word explains precisely the South African situation of 1990: the “newish” South Africa (The *Weekly Mail*, May 11 to 17 1990). The uncertainty and ambiguity characterising the South African society at the time is alluded to in the title by a question mark: “A Far Cry from the old South Africa?” This ‘newish’ South Africa has two sides to it, as there are passages in the article that seem almost hostile to the changing times: “Downtown Johannesburg formed into a black city; new and ugly buildings dominating the skylines”, but in the same paragraph the positive changes are mentioned: “people relaxing in parks who once entered them only to water and weed, people in positions in business they could once never have aspired to” (The *Weekly Mail*, May 11 to 17 1990).

The young Mary Benson is described as “unaware of politics and discrimination as most other young white South Africans, her role models were filmstars rather than political activists” (The *Weekly Mail*, May 11 to 17 1990). It was an activist priest and the novel *Cry the beloved country* by Alan Paton that made her politically aware. What Mary Benson has written is not discussed or mentioned in the article. Benson was put in house arrest for her affiliations with the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the ANC (Hallet: 1989). Many readers might know about her, but the fact that Benson was in exile from the 1960s until her death in 2000 makes it probable that not all readers would have known her in 1990. The only book by her referred to in the article, is her autobiography *A far cry, the making of a South African*, which is reflected in the title. Rather than

explaining the reasons for her exile, Schwartz questions how it could happen by describing Benson's physical characteristics:

It is extraordinary that this gentle, non-judgemental and warmly beautiful woman with the twinkle in her blue eyes and a great talent for enjoyment could have been considered a threat to the country she cares for so passionately. (...) But it was probably that passion that so alarmed the Verwoerdian government which saw fit, through banning and house arrest, to drive into exile a voice and a spirit which could not be silenced (*The Weekly Mail*, May 11 to 17 1990).

In analysing the discourse practice, Williams' theories⁴⁰ about language as ideology together with Pat Schwartz' own statements made in the interview with me are interesting tools with which to scrutinise the ideologies in the text. Williams understands language not as a medium portraying life as it is, but rather as a creator of truths about life. Language can contest as well as articulate ideology. Language is always a social practice, "it is a socially shared and reciprocal activity, already embedded in active relationships" (Williams in Higgins, 1999: 133). This becomes evident in Schwartz' own statements about the article:

We were just trying to bring to people's knowledge what South Africa lost when they banned exiled people like Mary Benson. And the kind of quality of the person she was, and what she had contributed to this country and had continued to contribute to the country from her exile with her writing, her work. This was a much more in-depth, important piece of writing, I think. This for me was a very moving thing, I mean there was this woman I had heard about, I'd read her work. There was no way before 1990 anyone could interview her. She was... a non-person as far as the country was concerned (Interview, 2000).

That this was "a very moving thing" (Schwartz in interview, 2000) for Schwartz might be a reason for creating a heroic image of Benson rather than writing about "what she had contributed to the country and had continued to contribute to the country from her exile with her writing, her work" (Schwartz in interview, 2000). Schwartz told me that Mary

⁴⁰ See chapter two for a discussion of Raymond Williams' theories.

Benson had died a few months earlier. It was quite emotional for Schwartz, as they were good friends:

She was the most remarkable woman, and she was so crippled that you had to cut the food for her, if she had a meat dish she couldn't hold a knife and fork enough to cut for herself. But she worked, she travelled extensively, there was nowhere she didn't go, she went to the theatre, she went out to the country, she saw everybody, couldn't keep away from a social event, she was the most remarkable woman. And that was my first meeting with her, we fell in love with one another and became very close friends. So yes, what I was trying to do here was write about the contribution of a very important writer, to South Africa, the loss (Interview, 2000).

On the sociocultural level, the political climate in South Africa was quite different from that in 1985 when the *Weekly Mail* was initiated and Powell wrote the critique of the Women's festival. In the earlier period, the State of Emergency had started to affect the press heavily. In 1990, South Africa was still an apartheid regime, but the political situation had started to change. Just a year earlier, P.W. Botha had resigned as a result of a stroke, and F.W. de Klerk had taken office. Only three months prior to the publication of Schwartz' article, Nelson Mandela was released from prison and the ANC, the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and the SACP were unbanned. It was still another year until the National Peace Accord was to be signed, and the 'Group Areas Act', the 'Population Registration Act' and the 'Native Land and Trust Act' were to be repealed. Considering the general political climate and that Benson was a 'non-existent' person in South Africa, the outcome of the article would have been quite different if somebody with the opposite ideological outlook from Schwartz had written it. Schwartz mentions several times the restrictions on the visa granted to Benson, and the disappointment that the development in South Africa did not permit her to visit unrestricted. The society was changing, but it was still at a very early stage.

Through the analysis of the article, I argue that ideology plays a significant part in the outcome of this article. The beginning of political change in South Africa in 1990 provides the foundation for the article. Because of the political situation and Schwartz'

Gently does it at the Windybrow

THEATRE: David le Page

ANTHONY SHER would have had a field day at the Windybrow Centre for the Arts, currently hosting a season of **New South African Plays**. For this is a theatre complex where plays occasionally have to be cancelled, on evenings when cast outnumbers audience. This is not always a fair process. A one-person play that this reviewer attempted to see all by himself was cancelled without establishing (a set of scales might have been useful) whether cast was indeed larger than audience. Yet the same evening saw yet

another play absolutely packed out.

Admittedly the audience might not have fitted Sher's ideals: it consisted largely of street children, who would not have been there without some quiet encouragement from the Windybrow. Yet encouragement, rather than complaint, is far more their style.

The Windybrow's audience profile has changed as the demographics of Hillbrow have shifted. Yet their being an autonomous department of Pact has enabled them to survive, and of late, they are busier than ever. An active development programme means community groups, semi-professional and professional

actors are drawing on the resources they offer.

The centre has found new audiences by exploring the immediate community. A number of old age homes in the area, for example, are providing audiences, especially for the current production of *Black Age*, a play about the struggles of pensioners in South Africa.

Regularly packed out is *A Crowd in the Clouds*. It's a morality play; the title refers to the consequences of drug addiction. The characters include a drug dealer from elsewhere in Africa, a would-be actress, a naive Christian, the angel Gabriel and God, whose imminence is heralded by a cacophony that would strike the fear of Him

into the most hardened of atheists. Jabulani Nkosi is priceless as an Afrikaans caretaker. The script is very light in some places, and rather laborious in others, relying too much on explanatory monologues, but it adds up to an entertaining and harrowing drama.

The festival includes five other plays, including one from Egypt, *Marital Bliss*, written by Abdel Moneim Selim, and here directed by Michael McCabe. Vivian Moodley appears in *Cast the First Stone*. Moodley is the director of *Got Green Chilies Moko!*, at the Civic Theatre.

Very quietly, the Windybrow is encouraging people who may well come to be leaders in South African theatre as it reshapes itself over the years. If the centre's plans are realised, they'll at least stand a chance.

New South African Plays run until June 3

Finding freedom in captivity

THEATRE: Mark Gevisser

IN *The Island*, two political prisoners on Robben Island perform a version of *Antigone* to their cellmates and their warders. The performance works, within the prison-context, as a lightly-coded metaphor for the South African liberation struggle: Antigone, a stand-in for Mandela at the Rivonia Trial, defying the unjust law of Creon to obey her conscience.

But when the play was initially workshoped and performed by John Kani and Winston Ntshona in collaboration with Athol Fugard in 1973, it worked in another way too: the cell was a symbol for South Africa under apartheid, and the "production" of *Antigone* by the prisoners a powerful statement about the redemptive and liberatory role that theatre can play in a society subject to intense repression and confinement. *The Island*, as a meta-play, a play about playing, was to define the credo of engagement that powered protest-theatre for two decades to come.

How strange, then, to see it performed in 1995 — in the post-apartheid years when, rather than representing the claustrophobia of a cell, our stages might well throw themselves open to the wide plains of possibility, free of stricture or censorship. Is this yet further proof of our current crisis of imagination; of the fact that contemporary South African theatre is so dead that its only option is to return, nostalgically, to times past that were paradoxically easier, when theatre had a clear and unambiguous role to play?

If a revival of *The Island* had failed, there would be no doubt as to the answer to this

question. But the brilliance of this production, indeed its glory, is that it works not as nostalgia, nor even just as finger-wagging "lest-we-forget" severity, but as a living experience that explores the relationship of incarceration to freedom and thus of the past to the future. In so doing it places us, as free South Africans, in the context of our recent past in a way that neither allows us to forget what we have just been through nor insists that we wallow in it.

Rather, it shows us our history through the passage of time, the exigencies of struggle, etched on to the features and beaten into the bodies of its two magnificent performers, John Kani and Winston Ntshona. When they won their Tony awards for the original *Island* in 1975, they were, by all accounts, two charged young firebrands; angry bulls in a corral representing for the world the power of black resistance to apartheid. Now, 20 years on, they rattle around the cell as two old and tired men, exhausted, filled with the pathos of age, but still inextinguishable.

Just like the ageing and deteriorating body of Mandela — the eyes that weep from decades at the limestone quarry — they remind us what we had to go through to get to where we are today. They affirm that our democracy is not the "miracle" it is often proclaimed to be, but rather the result of a specific history, built on the hardship of the ordinary and very real people Kani and Ntshona represent.

Kani ("John" in the play) is *The Island's* head; cool, cerebral, single-minded and pedantic as only old men can be. Ntshona ("Winston" in the play) is its gut, a heaving sack of physicality



Exhausted, but inextinguishable: John Kani and Winston Ntshona PHOTO: HENNER FRANKENFELD

sweating anguish to the surface, simultaneously endearing and obstinate as only old men can be. I can scarcely recall a more moving performance than Ntshona's: why don't we see more of him on our stage? With his agonised moon face and his broad and earthy gestures, he is a Rabelaisian comic; howling, belching, laughing and bellowing his humanity, but

never once allowing his performance to overwhelm either the imaginary cell which he and John occupy or the delicate balance of their partnership and interdependency.

And that is the production's coup: so completely symbiotic are Kani and Ntshona's performances that they manage to represent both a duality in consciousness as well as two very different individuals. The terrain is laid out in the opening, pre-verbal sequence, where, for nearly 10 minutes, we watch the two men forced into absolute exhaustion on the island's sand-dunes by undoing each other's work. Coupled together quite arbitrarily by the cruelty and capriciousness of the state, they become perpetual reflections, to each other, of both hope and desolation.

Their control is astonishing. Wild ribald humour will crash, in an instant, into wrenching grief. And such generosity: despite the many temptations, neither Kani nor Ntshona steals the show and both allow the fierce poetic lyricism of Fugard — unmistakable even in his "workshopped" scripts — to shine through.

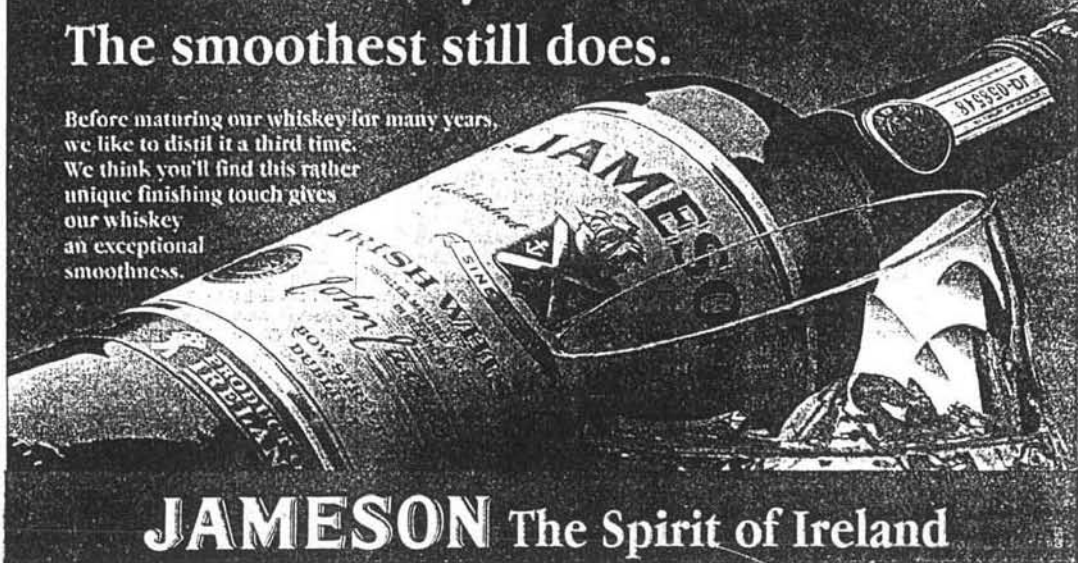
When Winston becomes Antigone in the final sequence of the play, he transforms from bumbling incoherence into powerful articulacy. His bent body is lifted, through the minimal drag of a wig fashioned from rope and a prison-blanket wrapped as a skirt around his waist, into the upright figure of righteous indignation.

The Island reminds us that performance has liberatory potential, in all senses of the word. It remains a volatile and quite unique fusion of gritty social realism and abstracted existentialism. There is no reason why, in 1995 as in 1973, it should not continue to play its defining role in South African theatre. It sets the standards for technical excellence and performance virtuosity, and proves that social engagement and literariness are not mutually exclusive.

The Island runs at the Market Theatre in Newtown until July 1

The first whiskey came from Ireland. The smoothest still does.

Before maturing our whiskey for many years, we like to distil it a third time. We think you'll find this rather unique finishing touch gives our whiskey an exceptional smoothness.



personal interest in the subject, the portrayal of Mary Benson is strongly ideologically biased, to the extent that the reason for Benson's important status is not revealed to a satisfying extent for the readers.

1995: Recontextualising protest theatre

The article "Finding freedom in captivity" written by Mark Gevisser appeared in the *Mail&Guardian* on June 2 to 8 1995. The article is a critique of Athol Fugard's workshopped play *The Island*, first staged in 1973, and restaged at the Market Theatre in 1995. The article is a classic-review; it begins with telling what the critique is about, the playwright and the context of the play, and then critiques it, specifically focusing on what the play, originally written within the context of apartheid, can tell us today.

The article, a classic review, constitutes a part of the majority genre of articles written in the *Mail&Guardian* in 1995. This was the last year the reviews were the biggest category. From constituting 53 per cent in 1985, the figure dropped to 38 per cent in 1995 and down to 17 in 2000⁴¹. The picture of the two black actors were not as unusual as it had been, but still, in 1995, only 19 per cent of the photographs in the arts section of the *Mail&Guardian* were of men of colour⁴².

Through the analysis of Gevisser's article, I propose that the fundamental question posed is how to find meaning in post-apartheid art, particularly theatre. I believe the reason Gevisser manages to recontextualise this 22 year old protest theatre play into a meaningful post-apartheid discourse, is because it is a meta-play. It builds on the Greek tragedy *Antigone* by Sophocles which poses universal questions about human suffering, and has therefore more of a general appeal in post-apartheid times.

On the text-level, Gevisser, early in the article, asks if our imagination has disappeared after liberation:

⁴¹ For a closer discussion and demographic elaboration see chapter three.

⁴² And of the photographs only four per cent were of women of colour in 1995.

Is this yet further proof of our current crisis of imagination; of the fact that contemporary South African theatre is so dead that its only option is to return, nostalgically, to times past that were paradoxically easier, when theatre had a clear and unambiguous role to play? (The *Mail&Guardian*, June 2 to 8 1995).

But Gevisser decides this is not the case with *The Island*. The play works “as a living experience that explores the relationship of incarceration to freedom and thus of the past to the future. (...) [The actors] affirm that our democracy is not the “miracle” it is often proclaimed to be, but rather the result of a specific history” (The *Mail&Guardian*, June 2 to 8 1995). The title “Finding freedom in captivity” alludes to the role protest theatre played during the apartheid years. In the last paragraph, Gevisser concludes:

The Island reminds us that performance has liberatory potential, in all senses of the word. It remains a volatile and quite unique fusion of gritty social realism and abstracted existentialism. There is no reason why, in 1995 as in 1973, it should not continue to play its defining role in South African theatre (The *Mail&Guardian*, June 2 to 8 1995).

Gevisser declares that performance has liberatory potential, without stating if performance and theatre generally still have this potential, or if it is the prerogative of this specific play.

Hall’s (1995) communication model⁴³ added with the historic discourse of the play can be used as a tool in analysing the discourse practice of the article. The first step in Hall’s communication model is the encoding, ‘filling in the meaning’. When *The Island* was staged in 1973, the play worked on two levels: it represented the theme of prisoners of consciousness, and it also expressed the power theatre can have in the struggle for liberation. The actors show the cruel effects of a repressive system, and the role art can play in liberating people’s minds. The play performed within the play was staged on a prison island, clearly alluding to Robben Island. The actors performing acting prisoners alluded to the one very famous prisoner on Robben Island, Mandela. This was the

⁴³ See chapter two for a closer reading of Hall’s communication model.

workshopped encoded meaning done by Athol Fugard and the two actors John Kani and Winston Ntshona in 1973.

Twenty-two years later Gevisser decodes the play. He searches for new meaning; what can the play tell us today, when the prisoner, the prison and even the system that created the prisoner and the prison, are no longer there? Gevisser is forced to decode the play differently than he would have done in 1973. The liberation theme is still valid because of the meta-play, the play within the play. *The Island* is no longer specifically about apartheid South Africa, but about the universal wisdom arising out of the Greek tragedy: we shall follow our conscience and fight the oppressor. We shall be liberated through the arts.

Thus, Hall's communication model works when history is allowed to play a part. New meanings arise out of new times, even though the old meaning may still be pertinent. Gevisser's critique of *The Island* can function as an example of how meaning is never fixed and how *The Island* allows for new interpretations according to the historic reality. Torfing's term 'surplus meaning'⁴⁴ explains why it is possible to establish new meanings as history evolves, adding new knowledge to previous knowledge. Cognition is constituted within present discourses, which have different structurations that change with history. These structures are never closed, thus open to changing and new meanings. Hence, even though the political structure of South Africa was changed radically from 1973 to 1995, meaning still arose out of the play because of our ability to develop cognition according to the contemporary society we live in.

Williams' (Higgins, 1999) critique of bourgeois literary criticism⁴⁵ is also applicable here in scrutinising Gevisser's article. Williams accused British literary criticism of analysing text without considering its context. According to Williams (Higgins, 1999), the textual, theoretical and historical dimensions have to be integrated in the analysis of a text. This is what Gevisser is doing. Gevisser integrates his theoretical knowledge about theatre in

⁴⁴ Read chapter two under the heading "Philosophical aspects of discourse" for a further elaboration.

⁴⁵ For a further elaboration, see chapter two.

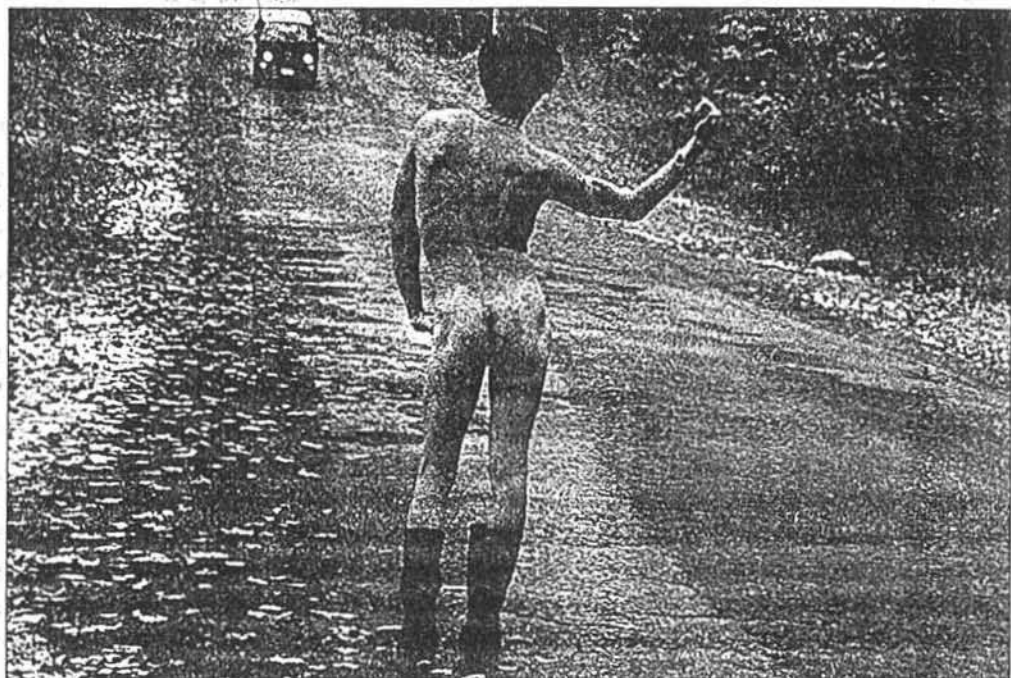
general and about the meta-play *Antigone* in the analysis. He uses the text to explain what it meant in 1973, before allowing the historic context to open for a new understanding of the play.

The major changes that had occurred in South Africa in 1995 form a part of the political and historical sociocultural practice of the Gevisser's article. A democratic elected government had taken office, apartheid was abolished. In the interview I did with Gevisser (2000), he stated that his interest and his academic work had always been about the relationship between politics and art: "My interest has always been to try and understand the society, specifically trying to understand South Africa in transition. This is what I wanted to do: to track the transformation" (Interview, 2000). In the article "Truth and consequence in post-apartheid theatre" (*Theatre* no. 3, 1995) Gevisser addresses the major issues that confront the previously influential protest theatre:

In the past, [protest theatre] found its voice and fashioned its style as a vehicle for protest against apartheid, and the staging of this resistance was, in and of itself, liberatory. Now, at the moment of liberation, South African theatre finds itself confronted with some immense dilemmas (Gevisser, *Theatre* no. 3, 1995: 11).

The persisting question, according to Gevisser, is 'what now?' What kind of role shall arts and theatre play in a democratic South Africa? The playwright of *The Island*, Athol Fugard, does not find the question valuable. "It's a question that drives me crazy. As if I've lost my capital, as if I've lost my subject, my material. I'm a storyteller about desperate people, and God knows there are going to be enough desperate people in South Africa to keep me in business for a long time to come" (Fugard in Gevisser, *Theatre* no. 3, 1995: 13). Gevisser is far from being as positive as Fugard on behalf of the future of South African theatre:

Now the question must be asked: can South African theatre practitioners discover new strategies for dealing with the post-apartheid reality – strategies that do more than buy into easy visual metaphors and facile allegories of reconciliation? And if South African theatre is forced, for both economic and political reasons,



Body of work: Bruce LaBruce in Cape Town this week for the gay and lesbian film festival, and (right) starring in his own movie, *Super 8 1/2*. PORTRAIT BY NICK ALDRIDGE

Interview with the sex dwarf

Gay avant-garde shock-auteur Bruce LaBruce is visiting South Africa as a guest of the gay and lesbian film festival. Shaun de Waal caught up with him in Cape Town

There can't be many movies, pornographic, avant-garde, or both, in which one gets to see the writer-director-star getting fucked in explicit close-up. Yet that's the case with Bruce LaBruce's brilliant and hilarious 1991 feature, *Super 8 1/2*.

That low-budget, mostly black-and-white movie marked a significant development from his dreamily obsessive first feature, *No Skin off My Ass* (1991), about a hairdresser in love with a skinhead, making for a film quite unlike any other you're likely to see any time soon, at a festival or otherwise.

LaBruce's new feature, *Skin Flick*, takes even further the complex of ideas in his earlier films. Working with the conventions of gay male pornography while simultaneously sending them up and using them to ask salient questions about the politics of sexual identity: it is a film that will shock, titillate and entertain anyone open to its unique charms.

It is showing at this year's J&B South African Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, along with the two movies mentioned above. LaBruce is also a guest of the festival, here

to introduce his films and to participate in a panel discussion on pornography, violence and racism.

Accusations of racism were thrown at the 35-year-old Canadian auteur when *Skin Flick* showed in London. One newspaper dismissed it as "contemptible", entirely missing the layers of irony in its portrayal of a neo-Nazi skinhead gang (one of them played by a Jewish actor) that invades the tasteful bourgeois home of a mixed-race couple and rapes the black partner while chanting racist slogans.

And that's just one unsettling element in a gloriously iconoclastic film, one which takes care to offend in as many areas as possible. Even neo-Nazi skinheads should be somewhat taken aback by the scene in which a young gang-member masturbates over a copy of *Meln Kampf*.

Unlike your earlier films, *Skin Flick* was commissioned by a real porn producer, wasn't it?

It's a little more complicated than that, because Jürgen Brining, who has co-produced all my features, probably partly got into porn production because of his association with my films.

But *Skin Flick* was commis-

sioned as an actual hardcore porn movie.

Yes it was. Some people criticise my films for going too far, but then others would say, "Well, it's really not that extreme — It's not even as extreme as your average porn movie," so I was sort of goaded into making a real porn movie.

The great thing about a movie like *Super 8 1/2*, is that you have all these things in the same movie, the explicit sex, as well as a real narrative, plus the humour ...

Yeah, I was making a point. *Super 8 1/2*, in particular is about porno, especially about Seventies porno, and how great Seventies porno used to be. My character in that movie [a washed-up former porn star] explicitly says, "In my day they appreciated an unusual face, a distinctive body; not all these interchangeable cocks and pectorals."

They all look like robots.

It's body fascism. I've been saying that all gay porn today is implicitly fascist. It's so monolithic, and the meaning has been flattened out. For me, it was a real experiment to make a real porn movie, but I discovered it's a really conventional medium, much more so than you might think.

You know, there's a formula, even for these European companies that are making slightly more unusual products. There's a style that I had to conform to. There had to be x number of sex scenes. Character A has to fuck Character B x number of times, it has to last x number of minutes, different positions have to

be covered, which is sort of a bitch to shoot. I was shooting it [*Skin Flick*] with my usual cinematographer, who's straight, and his camera assistant is straight, and the sound guy is straight, so they didn't have that much interest in shooting the porn scenes anyway. After you shoot one, you've seen it all, so we were trying to get into the interesting narrative stuff, the characters and so on, but the producers were always on our backs.

Now there's a hardcore version and a softcore version of *Skin Flick* [we are seeing the softcore version — LaBruce says it's the better movie — at the festival]. The softcore version I suppose inevitably brings the characters and the narrative into the foreground, and the contrast of the black-and-white and the colour sections makes the porn scenes more ironic.

It does. It was a condition in the first place that I could make a softcore version, which is more consistent with my other films.

In the hardcore version, the scene where the Russian guy [poet/activist/actor Yaroslav Mogutin] reads the long poem is gone, and his text over the sex scene later is also gone. For me that text is really important to put in context some of the extremes the film includes, because it makes it so ironic that you have an actor playing a skinhead reading a text about him being a sex slave, which I really miss in the hardcore version. That's his own text, which

wasn't designed for the film, but when I read it it was just exactly what I was talking about. His whole thing about being in the army and being the victim of a gang rape, except he likes it — it puts the rape in the film in a whole different context.

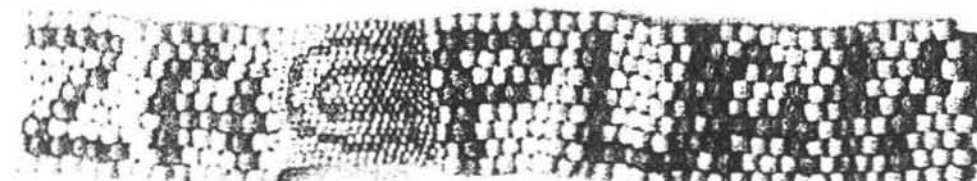
Having read some of the British press on the rape scene in the movie, I was surprised to find the scene wasn't more extreme. I mean, you're obviously satirising the rape fantasy scenarios that are already a formulaic part of pornography.

You know, I think some black people take offence because you're not meant to represent black characters that way. He's a black gay man who likes white men exclusively, and he's basically a bottom [that is, sexually "passive"]. Blacks in porno are traditionally represented as these sexual potentates, virile, aggressive people, which in a way is racist too. So I decided to make a character you're not supposed to represent — a black guy who's into [dominant] white men, getting raped by a gang of skinheads. Is this his ultimate nightmare or his ultimate fantasy?

And you're also sending up this chic, bourgeois interracial gay couple, sitting in their immaculate home eating sushi, with African art on their walls.

Yeah — I'm parodying myself a little bit, too!

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to celebrate a multicultural and democratic future, what on earth is it to do with the past? (Gevisser, *Theatre* no. 3, 1995: 11).

Through the analysis of the article, I argue that Gevisser manages to create new meaning in the protest play *The Island* by the use of 'surplus meaning' (Torfing, 1999). In the larger context, Gevisser raises an important question: where do we find our meaning, our truth now that apartheid exists no more? Within which discourse do we exist?

2000: Gay struggle and beauty queens

I have chosen to analyse two articles from 2000, because I find the present situation in the arts section of the *Mail&Guardian* very ambiguous. Statements from the arts editor and journalists⁴⁶ indicate that they are presently creating a mainstream publication concerning content. The rather confusing result of trying to be 'post-apartheid correct', is that the reader no longer knows what to expect when opening the paper. There might just as well be an in-depth analysis of an art exhibition as a shallow article about the most facile things to spend your money on⁴⁷. Hence, Gevisser's question about post-apartheid meaning is answered in rather contradictory ways.

"Interview with the sex dwarf"

The article "Interview with the sex dwarf" written by Shaun de Waal was published in the *Mail&Guardian* on February 4 to 10 2000. The article is an interview-preview with gay porn filmmaker Bruce LaBruce whose films was going to be shown at the gay and lesbian film festival. The reason for classifying the article as an interview-preview⁴⁸, is that the interview is conducted as a result of LaBruce's participation at the film festival.

⁴⁶ See interviews with Matthew Krouse and Shaun de Waal. In the interview with Shaun de Waal, he stated: "It's now a mixture, what's in the mainstream, what's outside of the mainstream and trying to come to terms with a sense of the arts very much in general as a whole. So that we make culture pages that will cover everything from kwaito to opera" (Interview, 2000: 6).

⁴⁷ See for example: "With the holiday season upon us, we begin a series that looks at people's passions and the things they do with their money to keep themselves entertained" (The *Mail&Guardian*, November 24 to 30 2000). The articles on the two pages are titled "Bluesy bourbon", "The magpie complex", "How to make a rock your real best friend", and "What to do on that morning after" completed with an advert for a hangover 'cure', which is also the topic of the article. As previously noted, De Waal points out that the *Mail&Guardian* wants to cover different types of cultural expressions, but he does not discuss or take into account the 'leisure' type of articles mentioned here.

⁴⁸ For genre definitions, see chapter three.

The interview-previews constituted 12 per cent of the total articles written in the arts section in 2000. Added with the feature-previews, the preview genre constituted 32 per cent and was just one per cent behind the feature genre, which was the largest category in 2000. The relationship between previews and reviews has been reversed since 1985. In 2000, the reviews constituted a mere 18 per cent to previews' 32 per cent, while in 1985 the reviews had a total of 61 per cent and previews only 14 per cent⁴⁹. The two photographs accompanying the article are both of the interviewee Bruce LaBruce, one is a portrait of him, and the other is from his own movie *Super 8*. As a white man, LaBruce forms part of the major category of the photographs in the arts section in the *Mail&Guardian*, but the percentage of 31 in 2000 is the lowest since the newspaper's inception. In comparison, men of colour constituted 25 per cent in 2000 and women of colour 11 per cent, the highest percentages in these categories since the start in 1985. The figure has been almost the same all years for white women.

In the analysis of de Waal's article, I explore how de Waal makes a powerful counter-hegemonic statement through an article informing about a film festival. As opposed to previous years, the counter-hegemonic statement is not in terms of race, but in terms of sexual orientation. The article is a forceful pro-gay statement done through a persuasive language, a catchy title and catchy photographs.

On the text-level of the article, de Waal makes use of the well-known literary way of catching the reader's interest by addressing him/her directly. The first time this happens is in the second paragraph, when he describes one of LaBruce's films: "making for a film quite unlike any other you're likely to see any time soon" (The *Mail&Guardian*, February 4 to 10 2000). The second time is more indirect, and de Waal includes himself: "Now there's a hardcore version of *Skin Flick* [we are seeing the softcore version – LaBruce says it's the better movie - at the festival]" (The *Mail&Guardian*, February 4 to 10 2000).

⁴⁹ For a closer discussion, see chapter three.

The article's subjectivity is 'hidden' behind a seemingly objective language of question-answer formula. The interviewee's answers seem to be printed as they were given, because the journalist does not reformulate the interviewee's statements, thus the article appears to be objective. Nevertheless, the article is nothing but subjective. It is the journalist who picks the theme, the journalist who formulates the questions, it is the journalist who decides which answers should be used, and how much or what part of the answer that will be used in the article. In the opening paragraphs de Waal openly expresses his content with presenting an anti-establishment view: "a gloriously iconoclastic film, one which takes care to offend in as many areas as possible" (*The Mail&Guardian*, February 4 to 10 2000).

The text is best described as explicit and direct. Some readers might perceive the language as vulgar. Like the Schwartz article, the language is fitted to the content. The title "Interview with the sex dwarf" intricately refers to the song "Sex Dwarf" by Marc Almond, and refrains: "I would like you on/ A long black leash/ I would parade you/ Down the high street/ You've got the attraction/ You've got the pulling power/ Walk my little doggy/ Walk my little sex dwarf"⁵⁰. The song, which was popular in the 80s, features on the soundtrack of Labruce's film *Skin Flick*. The explicit lyrics appear to fit well, both in content and form, to the film in which it features, as well as to the article. De Waal writes an interview with a gay porn director in a direct language about body and sex. In the opening paragraph of the article, de Waal writes: "There can't be many movies, pornographic, avant-garde, or both, in which one gets to see the writer-director-star getting fucked in explicit close-ups" (*The Mail&Guardian*, February 4 to 10 2000). He continues: "(...) entirely missing the layers of irony in its portrayal of a neo-Nazi skinhead gang (one of them played by a Jewish actor) that invades the tasteful bourgeois home of a mixed-race couple and rapes the black partner while chanting racist slogans" (*The Mail&Guardian*, February 4 to 10 2000). His interviewee talks in the same mode: "Character A has to fuck Character B x number of times, it has to last x number of

⁵⁰ I received the information about Almond, as well as the lyrics, on e-mail from Shaun de Waal, April 4 2001.

minutes, different positions have to be covered, which is sort of a bitch to shoot” (The *Mail&Guardian*, February 4 to 10 2000).

The photograph from the film accompanying the article shows a naked LaBruce from behind, hitchhiking only wearing high gumboots and a necklace. The other photo is of LaBruce wearing a T-shirt, cap and sunglasses, taken from a side angle, showing his tattooed arm and serious face. Both photos are striking and will catch the eye of a reader paging through the paper. Added with the title “Interview with the sex dwarf” in a bold and large font, it will either appal or create interest with the reader.

Race issues are also addressed in the article, in a way that would not have been possible in 1985, 1990 or even in 1995. LaBruce is playing on racial stereotypes in a quite sensitive way considering the South African context (LaBruce is Canadian, but the film festival event is South African). The British press accused his last film *Skin Flick* of being racist. LaBruce does not agree:

You know, I think some black people take offence because you're not meant to represent black characters that way. (...) Blacks in porno (sic) are traditionally represented as these sexual potentates, virile, aggressive people, which in a way is racist too. So I decided to make a character you're not supposed to represent – a black guy who's into [dominant] white men, getting raped by a gang of skinheads. Is this his ultimate nightmare or his ultimate fantasy? (The *Mail&Guardian*, February 4 to 10 2000).

There are some similar features in the discourse practice of de Waal and Powell's articles in that they both try to remove or push the boundaries of what is accepted as art, and how the art should be evaluated. Powell upgrades 'ethnological artefacts' and degrades 'Impressionism' through the use of sarcasm and artistic and political critique. De Waal's article is different, in the respect that gay issues generally do not get much attention in South Africa, and particularly the combination of gay issues and pornography. Thus de Waal upgrades pornography, specifically gay pornography, simply by giving it a whole page's focus.

Greimas' (1968) semiotic square⁵¹ can again be a useful way of explaining the shift in evaluation and appreciation of a genre little known and little appreciated by the cultural hegemony. Pornography is traditionally placed in the third corner together with the fakes, ready-mades and anti-art, and in the lower part of the square with the 'not-culture', which is new and uncommon, and the 'not-art' which is reproduced and commercial. As pornography generally is being considered as anti-art and anti-culture, it normally does not get much attention in the media. If it does get attention, it is usually a negative focus on the poor aesthetic quality of many films, and on the commercial and exploitative side of the industry. De Waal does not acknowledge the common image of the pornography industry. By treating it seriously, expressing an obvious liking for the films himself, and asking a director about his work, de Waal tries to do away with stereotypes the readers might have about this film genre. Hence de Waal places LaBruce's gay pornography elegantly in the upper half of the semiotic square with the authentic art and culture, the original, singular 'real art' belonging to the connoisseurship and the art market.

On the sociocultural practice level, the elections in 1994 appear to be far away in 2000 and race issues are generally no longer considered interesting in the arts section, unless treated the way LaBruce does it, by completely inverting racial stereotypes. Still, misconceptions prevail in society, not only about race, but also about homosexuality. The *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian* has been a fore-fronter in addressing gay issues. As de Waal stated in the interview with me: "Until we started writing about this kind of thing, you did not see issues like gay politics in the mainstream media at all" (Interview, 2000). On top of always having been opposed to hegemonic views in general, the interest in gay issues is probably also due to the fact that a large part of the journalists in the arts section are, and have been, gay (white men). De Waal largely confirms this view: "I am defined by the fact that I'm white, that I'm male, that I'm gay, that I have a particular background in the arts, that I have particular interests, that I have particular concerns, that I have particular politics. (...) I'm not pretending to be an objective journalist" (Interview, 2000).

⁵¹ See chapter two, page 21, for a diagram of the semiotic square.

Miss South Africa: From

Nechama Brodie looks at the legacy of South Africa's beauty queens

Historically, the spectacle of a pageant was used as a means of expressing national, religious or communal identity.

The occasion may have ranged from fertility rites and harvest festivals to military victory parades. Beauty pageants were a natural extension of this, alone or as part of a larger celebration, allowing communities to affirm their standards and values in the physical form of the pageant winner. A forerunner of modern democracy, a beauty pageant represented the chance for any entrant, commoner or noble, to become queen for a day.

There were, of course, less charitable interpretations of these social events, such as the search for a beautiful mate.

One of the oldest recorded "beauty pageants" must be that of Jewish heroine Esther who, chosen as the new queen for the king of Persia from a stream of other hopefuls, used her beauty and feminine wiles to prevent the mass execution of the resident Jewish population. The event is now celebrated as the Jewish festival of Purim.

The modern beauty pageant, as we know it, began to emerge in the late 19th century. The principle remained the same: a pageant winner was expected to embody the ideals of her society. At the turn of the century this meant a woman who would go on to be a good wife and mother and who scorned the use of make-up. By the Nineties, beauty queens were



Black more beautiful? At the 1970 Miss World contest Miss Africa South, Pearl Jansen, came second, while the Miss South Africa entrant placed fifth. PHOTOGRAPHS: SUNDAY TIMES

expected to be goal-oriented, usually with a degree or a career, and a superhuman interest in charitable or social causes.

South African beauty pageants have under-

gone similar transformations since their introduction nearly a century ago.

As a result of the grand apartheid-induced colour farce, there were often several women

who could lay claim to the title of national beauty at any given time: there was Miss South Africa (white); Miss Africa South (black); yet another Miss South Africa (black; sponsored by the South African Non-White Cultural Syndicate); Miss RSA (between 1975 and 1981, sponsored by *Rapport*) and even Miss Universe South Africa (1995 to 1997, before the franchise was reawarded to Miss South Africa).

South Africa's earliest reported pageant took place in 1910 when four women met in Cape Town to compete for the dubious title of Miss Union. The ladies had each been selected by a prominent "gentleman" from their respective provinces.

Throughout the "teens" and into the Twenties national beauty contests persisted, sponsored by magazine titles like *Stage & Cinema*, with grand prizes of brief movie contracts and a chance to meet the stars. A Miss South Africa contest held in 1926, organised by *SA Lady's Pictorial*, managed to crown a winner, but was banned by the Cape Town city council the following year for being undignified and unbecoming.

Numerous competitions followed in the Thirties and Forties, with pageant fever only being halted by the events of World War II. The contests resumed in full force in 1948, with two different pageants offering women the chance to become "Miss South Africa".

The first offered a first prize that included a trip to Hollywood, New York, Amsterdam, London, Paris and Canada, and a 1.5 carat diamond ring. The winner, crowned by then prime minister Jan Smuts, was Bloemfontein resident Avelyn Macaskill.

The second competition, with a different sponsor, offered a six-month film contract and

In search of beauty

Veteran reporter Doreen Levin has been intrigued by the Miss South Africa beauty pageant since first covering the event in 1972

Rachel Martens

'The first Miss South Africa competition I attended was held at the Johannesburg City Hall," recalls Doreen Levin, wryly adding that much of the evening was spent carrying messages for irate performers who couldn't get on to the stage.

It was an assignment that, in her own words, she "absolutely adored" and the following year, in 1973, she was chosen to accompany Shelley Latham to the Miss World pageant in London.

Going on to cover the Miss South Africa pageant 18 times and accompany eight of the winners abroad, Levin quickly became regarded as an expert on the subject. "People suddenly decided that I was an authority," she says. "And I wasn't." But the endless stream of questions ("Who was that girl who...?") prompted Levin to find out what the answers were.

"I love research," she says, "and having started out finding information on all the winners in the Seventies, it soon expanded to the pageants of the Fifties and Sixties. Then one of the Miss South Africa committee members told me about the Miss Union competition in 1910 and I suddenly realised that any girl who went overseas representing South Africa was, in fact, a Miss South Africa."

Levin's research began with a file at the *Sunday Times*, on beauty pageants, but when the file went missing (it was either lost, destroyed or sent to an unknown museum archive), Levin sat in the Cape Town, Johannesburg and Pretoria libraries, paging through old newspapers and women's magazines for clues.

As her research expanded, families or relatives of past winners would occasionally



Royal follower: Reporter Doreen Levin (above) covered the Miss South Africa competitions from 1972 until the early Nineties and saw many women walk off with the prize, including Sandra McCrystal (left) who won the *Rapport*-sponsored title of Miss RSA in 1980.

PHOTOGRAPHS: RUTH MOTAU AND SUNDAY TIMES

contact Levin and supply her with valuable information. "I've been doing this, in my spare time, for more than 20 years," Levin says, "and the tragedy is that I'd often find people and then lose them again when they moved."

Undaunted, Levin's investigation has taken her as far as the Missing Persons Bureau in Australia, where she successfully tracked down a past winner.

While the nature of beauty pageants has changed significantly over the years, Levin is still an attentive observer.

"My individual choice is not usually the one who wins... I see things that other people don't see. The only time I have been completely stunned by a contestant's beauty was when I

saw Anneline Kriel. I knew that she would go on to become Miss South Africa, and Miss World."

The years of observation have also yielded some valuable insights. "Some people have a fixation about being beautiful, which they think means looking a certain way. But they eventually learn it isn't so," she muses. "Those with real, enduring beauty have something about them... an essence... like a perfume. You've either got it or you haven't."

People who would like to contribute information to Doreen Levin's book can write to her at PO Box 46290, Orange Grove, 2119

Hedging their

Nechama Brodie

Winning a national beauty title isn't easy, as most contestants will tell you. But it pays to be persistent.

Several winners of Miss South Africa were already veterans of the competition by the time they were crowned — having entered the pageant at least once in the past.

Andrea Stelzer gets the award for most entries: having come second in the Miss RSA pageant in 1982 and again in 1984, she finally won the Miss South Africa title in 1985. Stelzer later entered and won the title of Miss Germany in 1988. She reached the semi-finals of Miss Universe, but was refused entry to Miss World because of her South African heritage.

Her behaviour must have set a precedent for future contestants: Sandy McCormick, Miss South Africa 1986, was Stelzer's first runner up the previous year. The 1988 winner, Janine Botbyl, had only placed third in 1987. Botbyl's sister, Diana Tilden-Davis, carried on the family tradition by entering in 1989 (when she came fourth) and again in 1991, when she finally took the title — beating second place contestant Amy Kleinhaus, who proceeded to win the event the following year!

Unofficial titles

Miss Demeanour: Miss South Africa 1998, Kerishnie Naicker, was arrested in March 1999 for travelling at 180km/h in the black Hyundai that she had won the previous year. The car's customised "Miss South Africa" plates must have made the driver a dead giveaway... Naicker was eventually fined R10 000 and had her licence endorsed, after failing to appear at the initial court hearing. She's not the first Miss South Africa to have a record: Miss South Africa 1964, Vera Karasitas, faced arrest on her return from the Miss World pageant after failing to appear in court on a parking summons.

Miss Spoken: Tilden-Davis, Miss South Africa 1991, who, after being asked why all of the Miss South Africas were white, allegedly responded that black women were too busy having babies.

Miss Guided: 1996 winner Peggy-Sue Khamiso who announced that she would celebrate her

union to democracy

the possibility of being photographed with the stars in Hollywood.

Black women were not eligible for these contests and were restricted to beauty competitions organised by publications like *Drum* magazine. Later, competitions like Miss Black South Africa, Miss Africa South and local beauty pageants like Miss Soweto made compromised provision for South Africa's "non-whites", with the winners of Miss Africa South going on to represent South Africa at the Miss World pageant — alongside the white Miss South Africa winner! The ban against black entrants was lifted by 1978, but the issue was only partially resolved in the early Nineties.

The introduction of the Miss World and Miss Universe pageants in the 1950s brought some consistency to the (white) beauty pageants, with only one official winner being crowned.

In 1952, Catherine Higgins was the first woman to represent South Africa at the Miss Universe pageant, where she got as far as the semi-finals. South Africa's most successful pageant entrant during the Fifties was undoubtedly Penny Coelen, who won the Miss World title in 1958.

In the Seventies, South Africa's racial duplicity often left organisers with some astonishing results: at the 1970 Miss World contest, Miss Africa South (Paul Jansen) came second, while Miss South Africa (Jillian Jessup) placed fifth. The event was protested against by Britain's Liberal Party, who claimed that the two entrants propagated the policies of apartheid. In that same year, in Johannesburg, schoolteacher Kazeka Ntantala was also voted Miss South Africa, but her overseas tours

were cancelled due to lack of funds.

By 1976, nine contestants chose to withdraw from the Miss World pageant, in protest against South Africa's presence. These were the titleholders from India, Mauritius, Liberia, Malaysia, Philippines, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, Swaziland and Yugoslavia. The following year, five countries withdrew again. Notwithstanding their reported aversion to politics, contest organisers Eric and Julia Morley decided to ban South Africa from the pageant.

Despite the problems with Miss World, Afrikaans newspaper *Rapport* secured the rights to send a representative to Miss Universe in 1975, resulting in the launch of a separate national beauty contest titled "Miss RSA".

Margaret Gardiner, who won Miss RSA in 1978, went on to win the Miss Universe pageant that year, while her crown was noticeably more ridiculous than that of Miss World, it was considered a boost for national pride. The *Rapport* pageant changed its name to Miss SA in 1982, reasoning that it was the only contest to hold the franchise to an international contest. The decision resulted in there being two Miss South Africas in 1982 and 1984, although South Africans were banned from entering Miss Universe after 1984. The two pageants eventually joined forces in 1985.

South Africa was readmitted to the Miss World pageant in 1991 and Miss Universe in 1995. The contest for the latter was held separately from Miss South Africa until 1998 and was known as Miss Universe South Africa.

This year's Miss South Africa pageant, titled "Beauty Under African Skies", celebrates the diversity of all of its entrants: 16 girls — chosen from around the country, from Sandton to Stellenbosch, Welkom to Westonia — will



Top of their class: Penny Coelen (left) and Anneline Kriel won the Miss World titles in 1958 and 1974 respectively

compete for a lucrative crown as well as the chance to enter both the Miss Universe and the Miss World pageants in the future. Despite rumours of apathetic audiences, the ceremony is expected to draw in excess of six-million

viewers when it airs on e.tv on December 9. And while the dream of being a beauty queen is a subject of derision for some, with prizes of more than R1-million on offer, the odds are definitely better than the Lotto.

bets

victory by sacrificing a goat to her ancestors. The move caused animal-rights activists to remove her from their guest list.

Just be yourself ...

The winner: Miss South Africa 1995, Bernalee Daniel, who later revealed that she had been born with a club foot. Despite a lengthy operation, when she was only four months old, the beauty queen revealed that her one leg was thinner than the other and that her right foot was substantially smaller, forcing her to place cotton wool in her shoes. Surprisingly, judges and audiences never noticed the difference, or the scar on her leg — a tribute to her star quality.

The lost tribes of Israel ...

The winner: Ellen Peters, Miss Africa South 1991 (see cover). Moving to Greece during the Seventies, Peters converted to Judaism after two full years of study. She is now married and a devout orthodox Jew, living in Israel.

The loser: Anneline Kriel, who managed to convert to Judaism in a breathtaking two weeks before marrying playboy Philip Tucker in 1989. The marriage ended four years later, and Kriel went on to marry a man with the very unkosher surname of Bacon, who just happens to be the MD of Sun International.

Justine Win skincare products

Ten lucky readers can each win a hamper of Justine skincare products to the value R1 000. Justine is one of the sponsors of the Miss South Africa pageant. The hampers will go to the first 10 readers to correctly identify the 1973 winner of the Miss Africa South pageant featured on the cover of *Friday*.

Email your answer to arts@mg.co.za before December 12.



HEAVEN-SENT BEAUTY...

When Heather Hamilton crowns our new Miss South Africa, many of the lovely contestants might shed a tear or two of joy ... or disappointment.

...HEAVENLY SCENTS

They'll feel better for dabbing those tears away with new Twinsaver Essentials. Because each luxuriously soft Twinsaver Essentials tissue is impregnated with micro-capsules of aromatherapy oils. LAVENDER will calm them during the day, and help them sleep soundly at night. MENTHOL will help offset the discomforts of colds or 'flu, and CHAMOMILE helps soothe and reduce allergy and hay-fever symptoms. Isn't it time you indulged yourself a little too?

TWINSAYER
Essentials



An aromatherapy treatment in every tissue.

Queen-in-waiting: The Miss



Janine Norma Arendse

An ambition to be successful in every project she tackles, both personal and professional, is what drives Janine (22) from Ottery in Cape Town. Although a full-time model, she also holds a qualification in human resources management. In her spare time she takes part in freestyle modern dancing, loves gardening and to maintain the balance in her life, meditates with the help of yoga.



Chantelle de Clercq

At 19, Chantelle from Welkom, is completing her studies in public relations and she intends qualifying as one of the Public Relations Institute's top practitioners. Her ambition is to be a world-famous fashion designer. To achieve her goals, she spends her spare time designing when she's not modelling. To keep fit she runs and takes part in kickboxing and aerobics workouts.



Angelique Hall

Angelique (22) believes grooming is very important for the image of both men and women and her ambition is to have her own beauty studio. She comes from Roodepoort and is currently a sales consultant and part-time model, who has a passion for interior design and decor. In her spare time she paints and sketches.



Mapule Rethabele Kgomongoe

Obtaining a doctorate in order to help develop drugs against life threatening diseases is the ambition of this 21-year-old from Mowbray, Cape Town. Already a BSc graduate and studying for her honours, Mapule loves travelling, cinema, beach volleyball and collecting postcards. She speaks four languages.



Kim Danoher

Kim (20) from Summerstrand, Port Elizabeth, enjoys public speaking and competing charity events. She is the current Miss Port Elizabeth and a public relations assistant for a hotel group. She studies public relations at the PE Technikon. Her ambition is to further her PR experience in consultancy and events.



Claire Patricia Drew

The goal of this 22-year-old from Sandton, Johannesburg, is to encourage women to develop a positive self-image through the attainment of health and fitness. She is a personal trainer and corporate consultant, and also has a diploma in travel and tourism. She intends to complete her studies in nutrition.



Layla Jeevanatham

An ambition to enter the diplomatic arena drives Layla (22) from Naturena, Johannesburg. She has equipped herself with a BA, majoring in law and international relations, and is studying for her LLB. She studies at Wits University and enjoys watching football, dancing, reading and gym workouts.



Khungelwa Regina Maliti

A 21-year-old Capetonian, Khungelwa from New Crossroads, Nyanga, has two very diverse ambitions — to follow her career as a chartered accountant and to one day have her own dance studio. Khungelwa is a third year student in business accounting and her hobbies include dancing, singing and modelling.

LUX SKINCARE

Proud Presenting Sponsor of The Miss S.A. Pageant 2000.

Lux Skincare understands a woman's desire to feel gorgeous, beautiful and admired. With The Miss S.A. Pageant 2000, Lux Skincare offers young, aspiring women the opportunity to realise their dreams of beauty.

Miss S.A. 2000 will join some of the world's most beautiful and glamorous women, Michelle Pfeiffer and Halle Berry among many others, who have been associated with Lux.

The ideals of beauty and glamour have changed but a beautiful, soft, smooth skin will always be a woman's most admired beauty asset. Lux Skincare extends warmest wishes to the 16 lovely finalists.



Where You Find Beauty, You'll Find Lux Skincare.

South Africa finalists



Ria Moodley

With qualifications in travel and tourism, Ria (22) from Phoenix, Durban, is employed as a debtors clerk and is studying bookkeeping. She intends to continue with her BComm next year. Ria has achieved one of her ambitions — to make it to the Miss South Africa finals; another is to complete her studies. She loves sport and takes part in indoor cricket, Sega and classical Indian dancing, and she is an avid reader.



Nomsa Albertina Radebe

Already in the beauty business as a cosmetic consultant, Nomsa (24), from Bellersdal, Westonaria, Gauteng, loves to travel, dance and meet people. She is a successful model, but her ambition is to have a flourishing business and be her own boss.



Vanessa Claire Schulze

To touch the lives of as many people as she can, is one of the goals to which Pietersburg girl Vanessa (22) aspires. Her ambition is eventually to have her own marketing and advertising company. Currently she is a marketing, IT and sales manager and is in her final year of a graduate diploma course in marketing management. For recreation she enjoys waterskiing, mountain climbing and writing poetry.



Dineo Tsolo

Already qualified to achieve her ambition to become a successful businesswoman, Patricia, 23, from Sunnyside, Pretoria, is a BCom graduate and holds a diploma in public relations. She is employed as an accountant in the South African Revenue Service. Spare time is spent watching movies, dancing and going to gym. Her dream is to contribute to the well-being of society.



Bathabile Msimango

At 19, Bathabile, who comes from Germiston, dreams of opening her own public relations consultancy after obtaining her BTech degree. A family orientated person, this part-time model loves to shop and read and her hobby is collecting perfumes. Going out with friends and family is one of the big pleasures in her life.



Nikki Roberts

At 22, Nikki, from Claremont in Cape Town, is both student and model with a passion for cooking elaborate dinners. She loves time with her family, walking, reading and gym. A BA graduate from the University of Cape Town, she is studying law. Her goal is to shine in whatever she may put her hand to and to love freely.



Jo-Ann Cindy Strauss

A BComm law student in her second-year at Stellenbosch University, Cindy (19) from Blackheath in the Cape strives to achieve her ambition to employ all her talents to enrich the lives of those around her. She enjoys river rafting, hiking, modelling and ballroom dancing and participates in various community service projects.



Mariette van Schalkwyk

A professional model from Westville, Durban, Mariette (23) dreams of one day being involved in wildlife preservation — and running the Comrades Marathon. She loves to run and cycle.

Miss South Africa airs on e.tv on December 9 at 7.30pm

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Where You Find Beauty, You'll Find Lux Skincare.



De Waal's reasons for writing about LaBruce was that he has "done a lot of interesting things with the genre. In the sense that he's taken pornography that is usually simply to provide pleasure and stimulation, and he started deconstructing it in ways that start to make it quite disturbing and also very funny" (Interview, 2000). De Waal hoped to make the readers want to go and see LaBruce's films and "have their brains massaged" (Interview, 2000). De Waal agrees that he is making a political statement with this article:

It was a political statement of course (...) Inevitably it's a political agenda in terms of the fact that I think that movies like [LaBruce's] challenge dominant discourses in a very interesting [way]. And of course being me, I think challenging discourses is a good thing" (Interview, 2000).

"Miss South Africa: From union to democracy"

On December 8 to 14 2000, the arts section in the *Mail&Guardian* printed five articles about the Miss South Africa contest written by Nechama Brodie and Rachel Martens. The front page was also devoted to the beauty pageant. The main article "Miss South Africa: From union to democracy" by Brodie is a historic overview of the contest. "In search of beauty" by Martens is an interview with reporter Doreen Levin who is writing a book about the winners in the 50s, 60s and 70s. "Hedging their bets" by Brodie gives some of the winners unofficial titles according to who has a demeanour, who is outspoken etc. "Queen in waiting: The Miss South Africa finalists" is a two page overview of the sixteen contestants with a colour photograph of each together with one paragraph about their interests and education. The last article "Centre stage for local designers" by Martens consists of interviews with different designers of the eveningwear for the contest and descriptions of the different dresses. The bottom half or bottom quarter of five of the six pages are covered with advertisements for products sponsoring the pageant and for the contest itself, broadcast on e.tv the day after the publication of the *Mail&Guardian*. The photographs accompanying the articles are all of previous and present contestants and winners, except for one of beauty contestant reporter Doreen Levin. There are seven pictures of women of colour (including two of Indian descent), thirteen of white women,

and one photograph from the Miss World contest depicting one black and several white women⁵².

The focus of analysis is on the main article “Miss South Africa: From union to democracy” by Nechama Brodie. The article is an example of a feature-preview in that it is a historic overview of the pageant motivated by the e.tv screening of the event. Feature-previews constituted 20 per cent of the articles in the arts section of the *Mail&Guardian* in 2000, and together with interview-features, it was the second largest genre category, as discussed in the analysis of Shaun de Waal’s article⁵³.

Through this analysis, I elucidate how this group of articles can be seen as an example of a new ideological direction in the arts section of the *Mail&Guardian*. To print articles about a beauty contest on the arts pages, is a huge move from the original ideas about the arts coverage in the *Weekly Mail*⁵⁴. The main article appears to be a historic overview of the Miss South Africa contest, but does not address important historical issues on sexism and racism forming an important part of the contest’s discourse. The articles might be an attempt at being mainstream in choice of subject-matter, but fail by presenting the theme in an unadequate journalistic manner. I also suggest that the uncritical coverage of the beauty pageant is an underestimation of the *Mail&Guardian* readership. The uncritical coverage could be motivated by advertisement revenue from sponsors of the competition and by e.tv, which broadcast the show.

On the text-level in the article “Miss South Africa: From union to democracy” the beauty pageant is called “a forerunner of modern democracy” (The *Mail&Guardian*, December 8 to 14 2000). The first paragraph states that the beauty pageant historically, without mentioning when in history, was used as a “means of expressing national, religious or communal identity” (The *Mail&Guardian*, December 8 to 14 2000). By the late 19th century, the winner was supposed to “embody the ideals of her society” (The

⁵² For a closer scrutiny of the development of representation on photographs according to race and gender, see chapter three.

⁵³ For a demographic presentation and closer analysis, see chapter three.

⁵⁴ See interview with Charlotte Bauer.

Mail&Guardian, December 8 to 14 2000), and today, the beauty queens are expected to be “goal-oriented, usually with a degree or a career, and a superhuman interest in charitable or social causes” (The *Mail&Guardian*, December 8 to 14 2000). Having the correct beautiful looks is not mentioned as a criterion in the article. Thus, the article fosters the view that the contest is not as much about being pretty, as it is about being intelligent, charming and having social responsibilities, which is always the view upheld by the organisers of the contest.

The reason for many different South African beauty contests being organised at the same time is attributed to the “apartheid induced colour farce” (The *Mail&Guardian*, December 8 to 14 2000). In the several contests mentioned it is stated that the Miss South Africa was white and the Miss Africa South and another Miss South Africa were black. What ‘colour’ the last two mentioned competitions, the RSA and the Miss Universe South Africa had, is presumably obvious since it is not stated. In the continuation of the historical overview of the competition, colour is not an issue. The competition was being “halted by the events of World War II”, but “resumed in full force in 1948” (The *Mail&Guardian*, December 8 to 14 2000) when two competitions were held. One offered the winner a six-month film contract in Hollywood. In the other, it is stated matter-of-factly that Prime Minister Jan Smuts crowned the winner who was given a “trip to Hollywood, Paris and Canada, and a 1,5-carat diamond ring” (The *Mail&Guardian*, December 8 to 14 2000). There is no critical discussion of the impression a contest electing the prettiest white woman without even regarding the existence of the country’s other races may have had on the public.

In the article, the words ‘not eligible’ are used reasoning why black women did not participate. Black women had their own contests, Miss Black South Africa, Miss Africa South and Miss Soweto which made “compromised provision for South Africa’s ‘non-whites’, with the winners of Miss Africa South going on to represent South Africa at the Miss World pageant – alongside the white Miss South Africa winner!” (The *Mail&Guardian*, December 8 to 14 2000). The exclamation mark makes the fact that white and black women competed in the same contest extraordinary, which in the Miss

World pageant not was perceived as unnatural. It is easy to notice how black women in the text are perceived as ‘the other’ who ‘also’ go to the international competition. This version of the world is very recognisable when a description of the 1970s results are articulated: “In the Seventies, South Africa’s racial duplicity often left the organisers with some astonishing results: at the 1970 Miss World contest, Miss Africa South (Pearl Jansen) came second, while Miss South Africa (Jillian Jessup) [was] placed fifth” (The *Mail&Guardian*, December 8 to 14 2000). Why the result is astonishing, is difficult to understand, unless the journalist believes it is impossible for a black woman to be prettier than a white one. If it were emphasised that it was white South Africans of 1970 who were baffled by the result, the text would appear different.

Brodie rounds off with the rather tasteless phrase about the 2000 contest considering the article as a whole: “This year’s Miss South Africa pageant, titled “Beauty under African skies” celebrates the diversity of all its entrants” (The *Mail&Guardian*, December 8 to 14 2000). Thereafter information is given that an excess of six million viewers are expected to watch the competition “when it airs on e.tv on December 9” (The *Mail&Guardian*, December 8 to 14 2000).

The analysis of the discourse practice of the text evolves around three questions as posed by Fairclough (1995). The questions, which concern the construction of representations in texts, are slightly edited to suit relevant issues in this article: 1) Whose representation is dominant in the text? 2) What motivations are there for making this choice of representation? 3) What are the effects of this choice of representation? (1995: 15). As noticed in the textual analysis of the text, there does not appear to be any resistance in the text in terms of questioning the concept of beauty pageants and what kind of view of women it represents. In writing a historical overview of the competition, no questions are asked about the ideological undercurrents reasoning why black women did not participate in the competitions supported by the state. From this, it is clear that the answer to the first question is the representation preferred by the organisers of the competition.

The reporter interviewed in the article, Doreen Levin, might be a supporter of this view. She is working on a book all the winners in the 50s, 60s and 70s, but is only concerned with the white Miss South Africa competition. Levin started covering the event in 1972, and covered the competition until the beginning of the 1990s. Rather than writing the book about a time she already knows, Levin is going back in history to write about a time she did not cover as a journalist. The reason for this is left unasked and unanswered, thus obscuring the possibility of revealing some important aspects the articles in general avoid. Levin is not asked by the journalist, nor mentions herself, the pertinent racial issues in South Africa at the time she was reporting about the event. Neither is she asked if she will include these aspects in her book. She simply talks as if there existed nothing but the white contest. Why she is not including the competitions in the 80s and 90s in her book is not answered either.

The answer to the second question about the motivation for this kind of representation (Fairclough, 1995), might be linked to advertisement revenue. This is of course one out of several possible reasons, but one which is worth investigating. The first page of articles does not have any advertisement, the second has almost half a page, the third and the fourth a little more than quarter of a page and the last half a page. That is close to one and a half pages of adverts in total. Half a page colour printed advertisement in the *Friday* section costs R17 100, excluding Value Added Tax (VAT)⁵⁵. In total that is R19 480 including VAT at 14 per cent for half a page and R58 440 for one and a half pages. Without knowledge about possible discounts or other arrangements, I assume that these articles brought in close to R60 000. The revenue value of the editorials for the organisers of the Miss South Africa contest and e.tv is on the other hand impossible to measure, other than that it is likely to exceed the amount they spent on adverts.

The last question, concerning the effects of the choice of representation (Fairclough, 1995), is difficult to answer without doing a reception analysis of the readership, which is not within the limits of this research. However, three angry letters from the readers the

⁵⁵ Yvette Legoabe in the advertisement department sent the information to me via e-mail on March 20, 2001.

following week could indicate that at least some readers reacted negatively to the articles. These letters, printed in the *Mail&Guardian* on December 15 to 21 2000, form part of the articles' immediate context in the sociocultural practice. An extract from one of them, written by Ruth Muller, reads:

[L]ast week's issue really hit the rock bottom. The *M&G* has finally become like all other papers and paraded its increasing lack of principle in *Friday* by treating us to 4,5 pages of advertorial water-thinly disguised as editorial. I admit I was puzzled (and of course fuming) until I got to the bottom of page 10 and remembered that e.tv now has the Miss World contract (The *Mail&Guardian*, December 15 to 21 2000).

Bev Gillespie from Green Point wrote:

If it wasn't for the fact that at my st/age I need all the support I can get I would have used the *Friday* to light a fire upon which I would have burnt my bra. Superficially disguising the articles in the Miss South Africa Pageant as some sort of "social hysteric" of the event gives beauty pageants that little bit more credibility – which they don't deserve. I expect better from my weekly newspaper – yes, even the weekend section (The *Mail&Guardian*, December 15 to 21 2000).

And lastly from Richard Pithouse in Durban:

Friday used to be a rare and precious space for critical journalism. But it's increasingly becoming just another PR vehicle for corporate shlock. More and more of the articles in *Friday* read as though they have been lifted straight from corporate press releases – the same press releases sent to *You Magazine*. But *Friday* reached an all-time low with the five-page special on Miss South Africa. There was no serious attempt at analysis or deconstruction. None of the writers asked why "beauty pageants" are infecting every level of our deeply sexist and increasingly shallow society. None of the writers asked what the impact of the national beauty pageant obsession might be. None of the writers appeared capable of independent or critical thought. Of course *Friday*'s surrender to crass consumerism and sexism was rewarded by advertisers. But the *M&G*'s readers expect their newspaper to print journalism for

its readers and not inane PR for its advertisers (The *Mail&Guardian*, December 15 to 21 2000).

These reactions might be seen as a healthy opposition from aware readers to what Fairclough terms ‘marketisation’⁵⁶. Marketisation describes a general trend in the media towards consumerism and entertainment. Fairclough sees this turn as negative and states that marketisation undermines the public sphere, because the ideology of the market considers people as spectators rather than participating citizens (1995: 11-13). The letters from the three readers indicate that they are not prepared to be ‘fooled’ by bad journalism, but want, exactly, to be participating citizens with opinions of their own.

Through the analysis of “Interview with the sex dwarf” and the articles on the Miss South Africa contest, I propose that the present situation in the arts section of the *Mail&Guardian* is much more complicated and contradictory than in previous years. It appears to have had far more coherence in the first years of the paper’s existence than today. While de Waal answered Gevisser’s question about the search of meaning in post-apartheid times by showing there are struggles yet to be won, the five articles about Miss South Africa are examples of how consumerism and entertainment have taken priority at the expense of serious, engaging and critical arts journalism.

⁵⁶ For a closer presentation and discussion of Fairclough’s term see chapter two.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

In “The White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage” it is stated: “Arts and culture may play a healing role through promoting reconciliation” (Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, 1996). South Africans think the arts are important, according to a recent survey conducted on the support of the arts (Greig, *The Sunday Independent* February 18 2001 and Friedman, *The Mail&Guardian*, March 30 2001). Three out of five people in South Africa would like to increase their participation in artistic activities, and believe that arts help children achieve in school, improve cultural expression and contribute to national pride (Greig, *The Sunday Independent* February 18 2001).

The arts function as tools for human expression, and may narrate all sides of human life, from everyday activities to political affinities. The arts journalist’s job is to analyse, critique and mediate the arts for the audience. Arts journalism might form an important part of intellectual development, because it encourages critical thinking. Charles Baudelaire, poet and art critic, offered in 1846 a definition of arts journalism:

The best criticism is that which is both amusing and poetic; (...)Thus the best account of a picture may well be a sonnet or an elegy... as for criticism properly so-called...To be just, that is to say, to justify its existence, criticism should be partial, passionate and political, that is to say, written from an exclusive point of view that opens the widest horizons (Darracott: 1991: 13-14).

The arts make us conscious of our humanness, or as arts journalist Shaun de Waal puts it: “Through art, through criticism, through the culture of debate, [we] reflect upon ourselves, who we are, what is happening in our society [and] what all these things mean” (Interview, 2000). The arts cannot offer short-time solutions to problems. Nevertheless, the arts can enrich individual lives and function as important tools for the development of a society in the long run. In this thesis, I have tried to manifest that arts and consequently arts journalism are important in every society.

I chose to use theories of discourse as a basis for the research, because theories of discourse take into account the open and incomplete character of any social totality and

insist on the role of politics in the shaping of social relations (Torfing, 1999: vii). Theories of discourse resist established, sovereign truths, because they claim that no absolute truth exists. Only descriptions of the world can be true or false, and these descriptions are always made within a pre-established discourse (Torfing, 1999: 276). The ideas of theories of discourse resemble basic notions in arts journalism. Arts journalists cannot claim 'the truth' about the arts, because arts journalism is not about facts and figures, but about interpretation, evaluation and judgement. "There is no one truth, there is no one narrative, it's changing all the time. Meaning itself is unstable" (De Waal in interview, 2000). Other related theories within the field of Cultural Studies have been discussed to contextualise theories of discourse. Particularly the theories of Stuart Hall (1990, reprinted 1995), James Clifford (1988, reprinted 1990) and Raymond Williams (1958, 1983 and Higgins, 1999) have been critiqued as well as applied in the context of discourse analysis in chapter five.

I employed triangulation of method (Neuman, 2000) in order to scrutinise the arts journalism of the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian* from several angles. The content analysis in chapter three offered a numeric insight into the photographs and the texts in the arts section of the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian* in 1985, 1990, 1995 and 2000. Firstly, the content analysis examined the development of the depiction in the photographs according to race and gender. Secondly, it categorised and numerated the development of the different genres of the articles in the arts section. The interviews with the journalists and editors in chapter four offered personal insights into the aspects concerning the history of the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian*. The interviews also provided a discussion of the relation between politics and the arts, entertainment and the arts, as well as the role of the arts and arts journalism in the South African society during apartheid and today. I employed critical discourse analysis as developed by Norman Fairclough (1995). Fairclough's three-leveled framework for analysis (the text, the discourse practice and the sociocultural practice) were useful tools in analysing the articles from the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian* in chapter five. The analyses of the articles show how the general focus of the arts journalism in the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian* has changed from arts and politics to arts and entertainment. This assumption is supported both by the content

analysis and the interviews. Hence, McQuail's (1992) indicators of cultural change, as referred to in the introduction, are to a large degree characteristic of the change of focus in the arts journalism in the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian*. "Social morality and/or political value" (1993: 286) are no longer valuable criteria in the art section of the *Mail&Guardian*. Instead, at least to some degree, "commercial criteria of success" have taken over (1992: 287).

Historically, the arts section of the *Weekly Mail* formed part of an order of discourse⁵⁷ consisting of differential and struggling forces both internally and externally. Internally, the section was politically situated to the left, but differences of opinion were allowed. The arts section did not consist of a unitary group of single-minded people, and the journalists working there were both 'conservative liberals' and radical left-wingers⁵⁸. Externally, the newspaper had to try to avoid being banned by government, keep up with the liberal white influential and economically strong readership, and at the same time, form part of the counter-hegemonic struggle.

The editors and journalists working in the newspaper fit well with the Gramscian term of 'organic intellectuals'⁵⁹. They articulated the concerns of the people in the sense that they paid attention to cultural expression both by the black population and by people in general, exposing cultural opposition. The journalists performed the organic intellectuals' 'mediated' role in the struggle through the production of cultural counter-hegemonic exposition.

The shift in power in South Africa formed part of a, in Gramscian terms, 'hegemonic transformism'⁶⁰. The change involved gradual absorption in a fight for consent with allied as well as antagonistic groups. The journalists and editors of the arts section in the *Weekly Mail* were agitators of transformation. They did not write about the physical violence happening in the townships, but concentrated on the more subtle forms of

⁵⁷ For a definition, see chapter two.

⁵⁸ See interviews with Charlotte Bauer and Ivor Powell.

⁵⁹ For a definition, see chapter two.

⁶⁰ For a definition, see chapter two.

opposition, those happening through the arts and culture. An example of this is the analysed article by Pat Schwartz from 1990, in which she interviews exiled author Mary Benson. No South African could interview Benson prior to 1990. Her interview was a sign of both the *Weekly Mail*'s stance against the apartheid state's treatment of Benson, as well as showing that times in South Africa were changing.

While the apartheid government supported a European artistic tradition through the sponsoring of for example ballet, symphonic orchestras and a state theatre, the arts section in the *Weekly Mail* would consistently avoid coverage of what they regarded as 'fascist culture' of the 'conservative übervolk of apartheid'⁶¹. In comparison with the more expressive sections of the *Weekly Mail*, like the local and national news coverage, the arts section played the low-key in opposing apartheid. Still, through a continuous disdain for the arts and culture supportive of the apartheid system, the arts section of the *Weekly Mail* continuously published a clear utterance against oppression. An example is Powell's article about the Women's art exhibition in 1985, analysed in chapter five. Not only did the article criticise the apartheid system in itself, but it also criticised the organisers of the festival for not managing to address these oppressive cultural issues well enough.

In the interviews, it was stated that the arts section of the *Weekly Mail* sought to expose the counter-culture. A quantitative evaluation of how well the arts section of the newspaper managed to expose black arts and culture is done in this thesis through enumerating the representation on the photographs according to race and gender. In 1985, white men were depicted in close to half of all the photographs, while white women and men of colour each represented around 15 per cent. Women of colour were hardly pictured at all. This confirms that the arts section might have worked to expose the counter-culture in South Africa, but it did not manage to showcase black arts and culture on a broad scale.

⁶¹ See interview with Charlotte Bauer.

As apartheid was abolished and the political situation in South Africa transformed, the order of discourse of the *Mail&Guardian* changed. The problems the *Weekly Mail* had with the apartheid government no longer exist. The economic situation was by 1995 secured by the *Guardian*, who bought the majority of the shares. Concerning the readership, the newspaper now seeks to reach out to new potential readers. Matthew Krouse stated in the interview with me that the readership today is more diverse than previously:

Now, the surveys tell us that there are more middle-class money earning black readers and that [the *Mail&Guardian* also] maintains, as they say, a faithful, traditional *Mail&Guardian* or *Weekly Mail* readership. And because of disdain for corruption in the government [the *Mail&Guardian* is] pulling in a more conservative white readership at the same time. So what's happening is that the readership of the *Mail&Guardian* is in fact balancing out whereas before you could pinpoint what kind of person was reading (Krouse in interview, 2000).

Through the interviews, it was confirmed that the priorities in the arts section of the *Mail&Guardian* today no longer is to seek the counter-culture, or black culture in particular. Nevertheless, the content analysis reflected a clear change in the depiction of people of colour in 2000. Men of colour are depicted in a quarter of the photographs, while white men are in 31 per cent of them. While the racial difference to some extent has stabilised, the depiction of women in the arts section has hardly changed. White women and women of colour together represent no more than a quarter of all the photographs in the arts section in 2000.

The current presentation of the arts in the arts section of the *Mail&Guardian* is rather confusing. Articles with a critical edge, exemplified by de Waal's article, appear side by side with 'shallow' articles, such as the Miss South Africa articles. Advertisement revenue appears to play a part of the present orders of discourse of the arts section in the *Mail&Guardian*, also indicated in the analysis of the articles about the Miss South Africa contest. Thus, two oppositional 'truths' or discourses are claimed at the same time in the arts section of the *Mail&Guardian* in 2000. One is the independent voice, the discourse

of the free-minded, outspoken or critical journalism. The second claim to truth comes from the economic power of the market, which regards the readers as consumers.

The content analysis of the articles revealed that the major category in 1985, reviews, constituted only 18 per cent in 2000, while the previously small category of previews constituted 32 per cent in 2000. A possible reason for the change of focus from reviews to previews is connected to the shift towards marketisation (Fairclough, 1995), commercialisation and consumerism. The arts section no longer performs advocacy journalism, but is to a large extent oriented towards informing the readers what is happening on the artistic scene, not least 'overseas', being in "the process after the boycott of joining humanity" (Krouse in interview, 2000).

In the apartheid era, when the arts section had a clearly defined political mission or purpose, the focus was on differentiation between 'good' and 'bad' according to artistic and aesthetic, but often more importantly, political criteria. The goal was to tell the readers whether or not the exhibition, performance and the like managed to challenge the apartheid cultural hegemony, and this was done through reviews. In 2000, when it is no longer a goal for the arts to challenge the cultural hegemonic establishment and it no longer is a goal for arts journalism in the *Mail&Guardian* to seek the counterculture⁶², it might appear as if there is no purpose in evaluating the arts. The better option might seem to be to just inform through previews about what is happening on the arts scene without considering whether the quality is good or not, according to standards decided by political affinities.

In conclusion, the shift away from arts and arts journalism defined by politics is not in itself a negative development, as long as it is not the consumer-oriented and commercialised journalism that takes its place. The shift towards previews could on the

⁶² The South African artist Ubuntu Bami, who exhibited at the Bat Centre in Durban in December 2000 and January 2001, does not seem to agree with Krouse in his statement that people no longer are interested in arts and politics combined: "It is often fashionable these days to look at politically motivated art as belonging to a by-gone era, the era of the apartheid struggle. But my own belief is that those views can only come from someone who has little to fight for. But as you will see from this work there is still plenty to fight for if you are black and a woman" (Written in the book for comments at the exhibition).

one hand be a sign of increased commercialisation, as seen with the articles on the Miss South Africa contest. On the other hand, a lot of the previews are interesting and well-written articles not defined by market forces, as Shaun de Waal's article is an example of. Even though commercialisation plays a part it previously did not play in the arts section, a majority of the journalism in the arts section of the *Mail&Guardian* is still defined by its tradition of independent, well-written and in-depth criticism and analysis of South African contemporary arts and culture.

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If nothing about South Africa is really funny, then why do our stand-up comedians get such big laughs?

Pretty fly for a black guy

Swetlan Ronnie Modimola has been performing stand-up comedy since 1997. He is fast becoming a well-known face on the growing comedy circuit in the country and last Saturday was seen at the Sun City Superbowl in *Laughter Blaster*, a major gathering of just about every local comedian worth his salt.

Modimola's routines are, however, in sharp contrast to the country's standard comedy fare, a profession dominated largely by disillusioned white males.

Were you always very funny?

I remember when I was young, when I was able to see things my way, when I would talk people would start laughing.

What does it mean to see things your way?

Understanding things you're looking at. Understanding things that I am seeing — without having to get a second opinion.

Tell me a joke.

The first time I went to a comedy club, audiences were not used to the idea of a black comedian so I told them that the colour that they see on black people is not what was initially intended, it's one of those acts of God — after creating one of us God put the guy in an oven, then God went out to check other things.

He was gone for a few hours and when he came back it was too late. He said, "Oh my God, the man is overcooked." But because he was God he said, "Oh my Me! Shit, look his hair is fucked," so to make up for it he gave black people rhythm.

What are you trying to achieve by confronting your audience with the reality of race in this country?

Somewhere I hope that what I say might bring whites, blacks, coloureds and Indians together.

But are you really attempting to bring people together, or is it an attempt to point out to your largely white audience what the problems of racism are? Are you really on a goodwill mission?

I am on a goodwill mission; it's just that sometimes people take things too seriously. Making people laugh should not be such a big deal. As a black stand-up comedian the audience expects me to play a black man.

The jokes that get a standing ovation are jokes that look down on me as a black person, which I don't care much about — a joke is a joke. But I wanted to get to that point where a black comedian is looked at as a comedian and not just as a black man joking.

Isn't there a contradiction in that? I don't necessarily think that you're out to bond with your audience. I don't think that by walking on stage with a whole lot of supposedly stolen car stereotypes you're saying, "I'm a nice black man".

It's not that I'm advocating crime. The message I'm sending is that it's a funny country and let's laugh about it. I'm not saying that only



Ronnie Modimola: 'Nothing is not funny for me.' PHOTOGRAPH: MARK GREENBERG

black people steal car radios.

There's this joke I do about dating black girls. You know what they say too much of one thing is not good so now I want to try it out with a white girl. I have actually tried it out but it did not work.

I paid her a visit, her mother went to the bathroom to throw up. The sound I could hear from the bathroom was "blaack, blaack". I could get the message. She didn't have to make it that obvious.

The way I look at audiences in South Africa — audiences I have worked for — I think they still need a bit of education about comedy. Take it for what it is, take it for what it stands for.

Isn't that an easy device for pulling audiences? The particular routine you do isn't just comedy, it's confrontational.

Well they shouldn't go to comedy clubs to judge comedians. They should go to comedy clubs to enjoy themselves. But right now we can't move away from race.

You know, they say that a person who plays the piano is a pianist, but Michael Schumacher, on the other hand is a racing car driver, but he's not called a racist.

Do you do any work other than comedy?

At the moment I'm doing nothing but comedy.

Are you earning a living?

I am earning a little living.

If I asked you to stand up on stage and tell jokes until you can't speak any longer how long could you go for?

Forty minutes. I have plenty of jokes that I have not tried out on an audience. Some I've tried on an audience and they're not that funny, they still need work. Maybe they were funny, but not that funny.

What isn't funny?

You mean for me? What isn't funny for me?

No, generally, in the world.

I can't think of anything at the moment.

Nothing is not funny, for me.

Ronnie Modimola spoke to Matthew Krouse

White men can't joke

Matthew Krouse

Anyone who was around in the Sixties couldn't possibly forget the local variety stage show called *Wait a Minim* that played to packed houses at Johannesburg's Intimate theatre before touring abroad. It kick-started a trend of self-serving pathos in indigenous white humour.

One would be hard-pressed to find a South African over 30 who doesn't remember the show's star, Jeremy Taylor, or his mega-hit of the era, *Ag Pleez Daddy*, sung from the point of view of a kid begging his father to take his family of 10 to the drive-in. The point was that middle-lower class whites had bad taste and no money.

It was a sort of musical version of the cartoon Flip Foster that once poked fun at suburbia, nudging whites off their pedestals, and it seems to have set a precedent from which local comedy has never quite recovered.

More than a decade later, with the advent of television in the late Seventies, came another major comedy moment — *Billong and Pot Roast* — a studio competition that harped on the cultural differences between English and Afrikaans-speakers.

Today, it seems that we have come full circle. A live comedy boom is currently taking the suburbs by storm. Comedy venues seem to be springing up in all the comfort zones — places like Randburg's Funny Farm, Hurricanes in the Fourways Mall and Stars Studio in Pretoria's Sheraton Hotel.

Last Saturday saw an exemplary gathering of the cream of the current comedy crop



Big gun: John Vilsmas

at the Sun City Superbowl called *Laughter Blaster*. It included both newcomers and a smattering of old names who have risen from some hysterical oblivion.

Packed with over a thousand spectators, South Africa once again giggled and guffawed at Mel Miller, Eddie Eckstein and Cyril Green, gentlemen now more portly, but no less vociferous than they were when they graced the small screen of the old SABC.

The re-emergence of these stalwarts brings the development of the local sense of humour into sharp focus. Today, these old boks seem to reek of some hectic disenchantment. And this has left them stoning some very old cows. Eckstein, for example, seems to never have recovered from the problems that affected the health sector under Minister Nkosazana Zuma. Zuma, he said, stands for "Zero understanding of medical affairs," and that the minister now does the work of two men: Laurel and Hardy.

That is the basic tone of what our comedy veterans have to offer — that, and an inevitable lambasting of the petty criminals on the city streets. It combines with pessimism about the state of the country in general, leading Miller to comment: "What a country — we've got the greatest Constitution in the world. You can do anything you want to as long as you're not smoking when you're doing it."

As far as the new comedy troopers go, the coming of fresh blood hasn't necessarily brought with it new attitudes. However sexy, brash and rude these guys may be, they're borderline sexists — fortunate for them because in comedy it's considered healthy to break down taboos. The word "poes" gets used with abandon. John Vilsmas suggested dropping a panty-liner on flooded Mozambique, Al Progers said bras come in four sizes: "Small, medium, large and hallelujah!"

In my opinion, the current comedy road show has only two barrier-breaking acts in it. The one is *The House Boys* who do a lip-synch and mime routine that could challenge contemporary performance practitioners anywhere in the world. Their act is off-beat and surreal, they don't objectify women or come across as maladjusted whites unable to come to terms with a country that has changed.

The other is Ronnie Modimola, one of the few black voices in stand-up comedy, whose work seems to invert all the stereotypes currently gracing the stage today. As Modimola says, he's not into comedy because he's trying to be white: "Why would I want to use a penis enlarger for the rest of my life?"

See veteran comedian Joe Parker's comedy hurricane at Stars Studio Exclusive Supper Club every Wednesday night from 8.30pm. Comedians include Parker, Martin Jonas, Magic Man, Alyn Adams, The House Boys, Trevor Sturges, Robert Frijohn, Cyril Green, John Vilsmas, Chris Forrest, Ronnie Modimola, Ryan Whittall and Mel Miller. For information Tel: (012) 342-3313

One corrupt night

Stephen Gray

Midway through Michael Frayn's eloquent, passionate play *Copenhagen*, one wonders if there could possibly be anything further to be talked through. Two Nobel Prize-winning nuclear physicists, the Danish Niels Bohr and his former German assistant Werner Heisenberg, have battled out how their theories of uncertainty, of complementarity and quanta have intersected, diverged. They have shown how canny academic papers may lead to chairs, how their colleagues (all Jews) may have outwitted rising Nazi gentiles.

What is more, they have discovered that matter the size of a tennis ball might just commence the destruction of the planet.

But Frayn has Bohr's wonderful wife Margrethe — strong-jawed in the photo, and sternly played by Jennifer Steyn — watching over them. On our behalf she comments on how the lads misremember their breakthroughs. Although they awesomely opened the universe between them in the 1920s, they now are becoming sworn antagonists. Bohr will defect to Britain to build the bomb that Heisenberg wishes will not have to be dropped on himself and his collapsing homeland.

In the devastating second half it seems as if all Frayn's twisted, tortured talk around and about the point has become too solemn to bear. It is just horror unchained. Heisenberg's shoes catch fire with phosphorus and Bohr crawls on his hands and knees down a bench to be smuggled out.

Freighters coming in at night to pick up more Jews. Children starving on masse. Lives worth a packet of Lucky Strike.

Around these images, Frayn's play clusters in a civilised and urbane way, to be sure, hardly ruffled. Dale Cutts putters and ponders well as Bohr; Nicky Rebelo stays suited and urbane as his sidekick. With Margrethe they are trapped on a circular stage, as Maurice Podbrey directs them, replaying that pivotal night in Copenhagen in Autumn 1941 when they almost asked that unfathomable question: is there any morality at all in nuclear fission? *Hamlet* is the other play set in Copenhagen often referred to, so the message is: corrupt. Corruption always does make for spellbinding theatre.

Copenhagen is on at the Agfa Theatre on the Square in Sandton, Johannesburg, until April 1, before touring to Durban and Cape Town

f... (untitled)
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Durban's road show

Catch a bus to the city centre for the cheapest show in town, writes Merle Colborne

There was a cow on one once. It stood in the aisle and shat. No extra charge. In the bus business when you can gross R4 500 for ferrying the main course and 75 wedding guests from Umtata to Durban you don't get dainty about such things.

This story was told to me by a bloke called "Breakfast" — named presumably after the English not the Continental variety, he is a big man — who supervises the arrivals and departures of some of the 700 privately-owned and hugely accommodating buses in Durban's tumultuous Warwick Triangle.

Though one or two buses lean towards delinquency, most are well kept, some with air-brushed exteriors of flamingos, leopards or big-haired religious leaders.

The interior decor is whatever takes the fancy of the two-man crew — some of whom have worked together for decades. Manchester United is big. So are Hindu deities garlanded with fairy lights and plastic flowers.

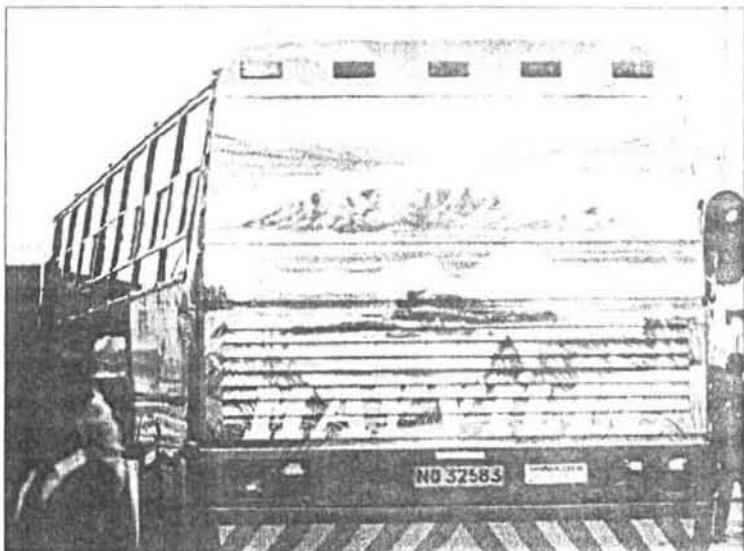
Love is hot, too. When the weather is the same and the windows are wide, and the red damask curtains bang their knotted hems against the panes, and the red satin hearts

with their white embroidered messages, "I love you" and "I'll love you always" and even "I'll love you always and forever", bob alongside the stuffed toys above the driver's head, there's a buoyancy among the passengers exchanging shy grins through the shrill melody of one desperate woman's private emergency, "Jolene, Joleene, Joleeeeee, please don't take my man/ just because you can".

Buses with names like Lovers Paradise, Free Willy and Bad Boys throb with ferocious rap — long chains of rude words that assault the sensibilities of the hijacked passengers and, at 140 decibels, pop their eardrums, too. "Some of the aunties like it," says the driver in wraparound sunglasses. "They go to the back of the bus and sit on top of the bass speakers so they can feel the 'doef-doef' go all the way through them, and smile."

Some of these buses have airline seats and TV screens, and show the type of lunchtime videos that make middle-aged women get off sooner than they should and school boys miss their stops.

My favourite bus deals in nostalgia. It's scrubbed clean and decoration is confined to the "Certified to carry ..." sign. The music, if there is any, comes from the occasional spontaneous outbreak and the joining in of passengers, which can bring a lump to the throat of one not used to such democratic joy. And



Paradise road: You haven't arrived if you didn't get there on a bus

instead of just handing your fare to the bloke hanging out of the door as you get off, the conductor, courtly in his peaked cap, comes around and issues real paper tickets and wise, leathery smiles.

Conductors are constantly busy — directing the drivers, helping the elderly, and hoisting crates of beer, bags of maize meal and small children up and down the stairs. They'll also happily load the stock that helps some people make a living: bundles of freshly made brooms, 4m-long sheaves of newly cut sugar cane or branches of litchis. A single street trader can sometimes bring as many as seven

or eight boxes of fruit, cool drinks, beer, chips and even ice on board — without anyone batting an eyelid or adding a single extra cent to the fare.

To lean in among the press of rail-humping bodies or to sit clutching someone else's shopping or feel the sprung surprise of one's hand on the puffy hair of the spellbound toddler on one's lap and feel vitally connected to the whole drift and spin of the extraordinary life of South African life is often to feel humble and, sometimes, blessed, too.

And at a R1,50 for the 10km trip to the city centre, it's the cheapest show in town.

Zia Mahmood BRIDGE

The World Teams Olympiad started in Maastricht last week. The United States is represented by a team led by George Jacobs, a successful businessman and an amateur player of the highest class. If George can display the form he showed on today's deal, there is every chance that his team will walk away with the gold medal.

Take his cards as West, and see if you can find the right defence at the critical moment. North-South vulnerable, dealer South:

North
▲ A Q J 10 9 8
♥ 8 3 2
♦ A
♣ K 10 5

West
▲ 6 4
♥ A J 8 7 5
♦ 9 7
♣ J 9 6 3

You are playing in the annual Cavendish tournament in New York. With a prize fund of more than \$1-million, this event attracts the world's finest players. Your opponents are the Italian superstars Norberto Bocchi and Giorgio Duboin, two young men with a couple of European Championships already to their credit. This has been the bidding:

West	North	East	South
Jacobs	Duboin	Bocchi	Bocchi
Pass	1♠	Pass	3♠
Pass	3♠	Pass	3NT
Pass	4♠	Pass	4NT
Pass	5♥	Pass	6♠
Pass	Pass	Pass	

4NT was Blackwood, and the reply showed two aces. Deducing from the auction that South would have a heart control, George Jacobs avoided the opening lead of the ace of hearts, and chose instead the three of clubs. Declarer played low from dummy, East played the seven, and Bocchi won in his hand with the ace.

He played a low spade to dummy's ace, ruffed a spade, crossed to the ace of diamonds and ruffed another spade. He cashed the king and queen of diamonds, East following with the jack on the third round, then led the two of clubs.

Imagine that you have George Jacobs's cards. What do you play? The full hand was:

North
▲ A Q J 10 9 8
♥ 8 3 2
♦ A
♣ K 10 5

West
▲ 6 4
♥ A J 8 7 5
♦ 9 7
♣ J 9 6 3

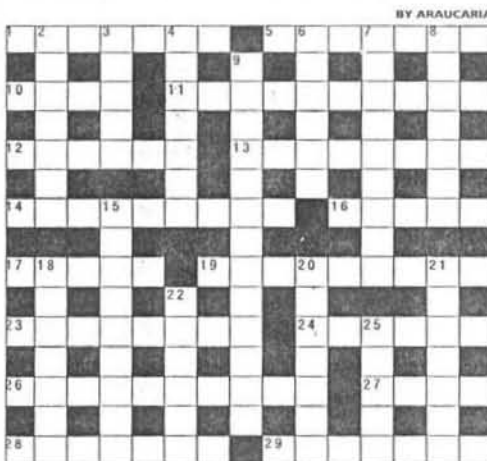
East
▲ K 7 5 2
♥ Q 10 9
♦ J 6 5
♣ 8 7 4

South
▲ 3
♥ K 4
♦ K Q 10 8 4 3 2
♣ A Q 2

Declarer wants to finesse dummy's ten of clubs to create an extra entry to the table to ruff a fourth round of spades before returning to the king to discard his losing hearts on dummy's spades. George saw this coming and played his jack of clubs!

Declarer had to win with dummy's king, so could not establish spades. Bocchi had to rely on a heart to the king for his 12th trick, but went one down when George produced the ace.

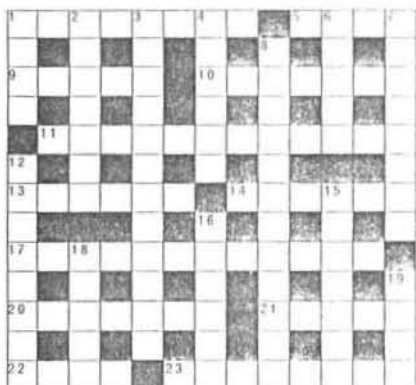
CRYPTIC CROSSWORD



- Across**
- Initially operate sand to receive invisible creature's head (7)
 - Laughed till bust in 12's 19's situation ... (7,4)
 - ... whence gnat eats badly worried nine with much umbrage (10,6)
 - Bullish fashion statement? (4,4)
 - Set to work to make a cheaper engine (3,6)
 - Supporters' visits? (5)
 - Supporters' goose step? (5)
 - Cardinal ends holding a red hat awkwardly in his seat (9)
 - Matthew's part to play — no amateur in novel room (2,3,3)
 - See 27
 - A vicar (not I) forged dead queen's signature — one for the road! (10)
 - Natter foolishly about 11 feature back on the 15 (4,6)
 - Victorian writer takes it from Labour politician (7)
 - Antique pearls provide easy money (3,4)

- Down**
- Where the fate of down-and-outs without energy is worked out (4,3)
 - Was 23, having straight lines (5)
 - Arrival includes physical education by an equal (7)
 - Hard as the bed of the one 23? (6)
 - Made like Parmesan, about three points (9)
 - Disclose your 10 medieval sports (7)
 - Hard labour for pirate king having forty winks? (5-8)
 - The poorer nations put their money on the end of the 11 12 (5,4)
 - Russian girl's farewell embrace of Scottish boy (7)
 - Low sound that's real, not straight from the shoulder (7)
 - Whence helicopters go off to Paris? (7)
 - Letter-writer from twin city whose 19 is opposite the 15 (2,4)
 - Put off some French potatoes (5)

QUICK CROSSWORD



- Across**
- Enjoyment (8)
 - Book of the New Testament (4)
 - Barbaric (5)
 - Choral work (7)
 - Fire-irons on stand (9,3)
 - Suck up (6)
 - Drink (6)
 - Origami (5,7)
 - First (7)
 - Device for dispensing spirits (5)
 - Average level of achievement (4)
 - RA cursed (anag) — one fighting for a cause (8)
- Down**
- Choose (4)
 - Eager to equal another's deeds (7)
 - Painting of the artist by the artist (4,8)
 - Withdraw (6)
 - Grossly stupid (5)
 - Suddenly frightened (8)
 - Cramped — inconvenient (12)
 - Series of activities to attain a goal (8)
 - Unit (7)
 - Standard monetary unit of many countries (6)
 - Former — head of religious house (5)
 - Mark left by healed wound (4)

Last week's solutions

Cryptic Crossword



Quick Crossword



From Shell House to Papa-Joe

This year's Windybrow Arts Festival is jam-packed with jazz, hip-hop and OJ Simpson Luvuyo Kakaza

Throughout the year, the Victorian-style, picturesque Windybrow Centre for the Arts is relatively quiet. In March it comes to life with the annual Windybrow Arts Festival, now celebrating its 20th anniversary.

Last week, Windybrow's phones were down and publicists were removed from their offices as renovations took place. Festival director, Maropodi Mopudakanye, was optimistic. "Hard times will soon be joyous moments!" he exclaims.

The highlights of the 11 day festival, which started on Tuesday, include jazz piano maestro Moses Molelekwa in concert. *Soweto, Soweto, Soweto - The Township Calling*, which will play at the Windybrow's Adcock Ingram Auditorium, promises to be a moving production by the Freddie Hendricks Youth Ensemble from Atlanta in the United States.

"The message carried in this production is that the youth can change the world, just as the

youth in South Africa helped to bring an end to apartheid," Fredericks explains.

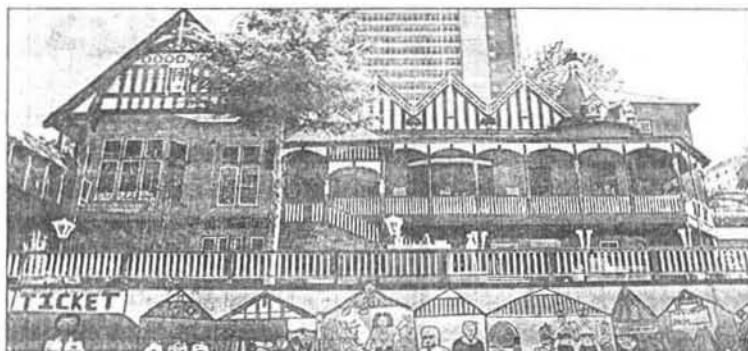
Another interesting foreign work to be presented at the festival's main programme is Sir John Laerman's latest work, called *OJ Othello*. Laerman is the director of Amsterdam's Cosmic Theatre in The Netherlands. His critically acclaimed *OJ Othello* interestingly draws parallels between the Shakespearean *Othello* and former African-American footballer OJ Simpson.

Laerman and Hendricks will also present a series of workshops at the Uncle Tom's community centre. Local artists, Yvonne Siblahla — a drama and dance teacher at the Soyikwa Institute of African — and Carly Dibakwane of the Soweto Dance Theatre will conduct workshops on new dance styles.

The workshops at the Uncle Tom's community centre in Soweto are a collaborative effort between the Windybrow and the Southern Metropolitan Council.

Coming from the Democratic Republic of Congo are Papa-Joe and Fafa, who will present their kwasa-kwasa rhythms and Kai-Kai, with kwasa-kwasa singers and dancers from Kenya.

On the local drama scene is Gamakhulu Diniso's *Koropa*, which highlights how reality and religion trample a domestic worker, who



Facelift: The Windybrow Centre for the Arts, currently undergoing renovations, will soon be hosting the twentieth Windybrow Arts Festival. PHOTO: RUTH MOTAU

gets raped by a gang and loses her children during the political violence.

Down Below Shell House, written and directed by Darlington Michaels, is presented by the Melisizwe Community Group and looks at Johannesburg's inner-city deterioration. The writer weaves in the theme of illegal immigrants and the occurrence of xenophobia.

Other musical events include the Afro-jazz outfit Chakubata, from Zimbabwe, and local Oupa Lebogo. American hip-hop rapper Toni

Blackman performs on the same night. Last year, Blackman won the prestigious Mayor's Art Award in Washington DC for outstanding emerging artist, and he has performed alongside the likes of Me'Shell Ndegeocello.

There will be music, dance and poetry programmes aimed at youth and free open-air shows of traditional music and dance. The Windybrow Arts Festival ends on March 25 with the presentation of the FNB Vita Awards at 8pm.

A theatre built on tough times

Thabe Mabanga

The Windybrow Centre for the Arts in Hillbrow is currently hosting its Annual Arts Festival amidst threats of closure. Now celebrating its twentieth anniversary, the festival could be the last if measures to rescue the Windybrow are not put in place urgently. "It would be a tragedy if we were to stand by and allow cultural institutions like the Windybrow to die," says Walter Chakela, the centre's artistic director.

In his eight years as the venue's manager, Chakela has presided over a place that has been adversely affected by a decline in arts patronage and inner-city decay. The Windybrow's annual budget of R15 million is financed mainly by a government subsidy that comes through the State Theatre in Pretoria. This is augmented by the First National Bank and the National Arts Council specifically for the festival, together with fund-raising initiatives like the Moses Molelekwa concert (with tickets selling for up to R200). Organisations such as the Fulton County Arts Council in Atlanta, United States, and The Netherlands government fund established crowd pullers from their respective countries to raise the festival's profile. During the 1999/2000 financial year, the arts and culture ministry provided a R12 million subsidy. For the 2000/2001 year no allocation has been made. This has left the centre with a deficit of R6.9 million and unable to increase employee remuneration for four years.

The non-allocation of funds is at odds with the Department of Public Works' decision to continue with renovations to the Windybrow as part of its programme to maintain historical landmarks. To rectify this, the Deputy Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology Bridgette Mabandla recently convened a meeting involving the Gauteng provincial and local governments to look into saving the Windybrow. "The funds needed from that meeting was that the Windybrow should not close," she said. "It is a case of either a three-pronged so-

lution has been devised," he continues, pointing out that a technical committee led by the national ministry's Stephen Saek has been formed to investigate the financial aspect of the rescue package. Chakela then concedes that their emphasis on development has proven costly. "I think we should not be too enthusiastic about development. We should move to a point where the commercial work generates enough money to then allow us to fund development." Chakela further advocates linking Windybrow's revival to inner city development. An example of this is the Greater Johannesburg Transitional Metropolitan Council's iGoli 2002. "My beef with it is that it focuses only on the Newtown Cultural Precinct. Which is fine, but not enough," Chakela says of the council's controversial privatisation plan.

What will help Windybrow, and arts in general, in the long run is an increase in funding. At the moment, the arts fraternity feels priority is being given to sports. As Chakela points out, "We do not begrudge this development. But it seems society is comfortable, even obsessed, with gladiators and not intellectuals." He proposes the formation of a co-operative through which artists can present financially viable plans to attract sponsorship and maintain themselves between jobs. The centre's expansion into Soweto through the use of Uncle Tom's in Orlando is expected to have, in the long run, a lucrative spin-off.

"Ultimately, the arts should be self-sustaining," Chakela says, "but to get there, there has to be funding to develop the different areas of arts administration and performance," he concludes.

A possible lifeline could be the recently launched National Lottery. But without any word from government as to who the beneficiaries will be — or when the first payment will be made — that seems to be a line too far.

Any artist who is interested in being part of the co-operative can contact Walter Chakela on (011) 720 7099/7094

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WRENCH ON ROCK

A favourite shop no-one can resist

THE Style Council's "Our Favourite Shop" (Trutone) is so full of marvellous wonders you'll want to stay there for a very long time. Every shelf, every nook and every cranny holds another gem, another song, another tune that's irresistible.

It's a great surprise after their debut "Cafe Bleu", which burst with bright balloons of brilliance here and there, only to sink sadly to the ground because of its inconsistency and its lack of any clear direction.

On "My Favourite Shop", Paul Weller and Mick Talbot direct their considerable musical talents at the Thatcher government, long a target of Weller's song-writing wrath, and the result is his best series of songs since he dissolved The Jam three years ago.

But it's not at all strident: one of the continuing ironies of the record is the sharp contrast between the lyrics and the tunes.

On the best, "A Stone's Throw Away", Weller sings over a chorus of violins: "Wherever honesty persists you'll hear the snap of broken ribs/Of anyone who'll take no more of the lying bastard's roarin Chilein Poland/Johannesburg/South Yorkshire/A stone's throw away". It's a powerful, moving song that hits somewhere just below the heart.

The broad sound of the record is jazz/sixties inspired, always held together by Talbot's keyboards, notably his Hammond organ which has become the Style Council's trademark. There are horns, too, introduced on the hypnotically beautiful "Homebreakers", a caustic attack on unemployment.

Though his lyrics have never been sharper, Weller's voice is frequently at its most whimsical. This is not a trendy rich boy shrilly lamenting the cause of the down-trodden. This is the voice of the informed and awfully committed. This man has been down there on the unemployment lines, he's seen the towns and communities that have "All Gone Away" and he's sadly but powerfully recording that; he's vehemently rejecting Thatcher's youth employment schemes aimed at the kids with "With Everything to Lose".

But the record is not a litany of woes; it offers a radical set of solutions. On the rousing, anthemic "Walls Come Tumbling Down": "You don't have to take this crap/You don't have to sit back and relax/You can actually try changing it".

There's a couple of the Style Council's nouveau love songs too: "Our Favourite Shop" is nothing if not passionate. And it's everything you could want it to be into the bargain.

Sting's solo debut "The Dream of the Blue Turtles" (RPM) is a different bowl of beasties altogether. The Chief Policeman has temporarily shed his group and gathered about him some top jazz musicians, most notable among them Branford Marsalis on saxophone.

At Eddy Grant's studios in Barbados, they've put together a quirky record with some jolly nice moments. The most colourful fish in this sea are the ones which have caught the jazz bug most badly. "Moon over Bourbon Street" warbles along to Sting's own double bass playing in a seductive way. The title track is a minute of inspired jazz.

New pop toons too: the hit "If You Love Someone" is the best, drawing on gospel, jazz and mainstream pop. "Consider Me Gone" holds its breath most appealingly. Sting even revamps "Shadows in the Rain" from "Zenyatta Mondatta", with a big bandish treatment. Daring.

Sting's still concerned to show he's concerned about war, the bomb, and especially children: natural enough since he has two babies now, but a bit well-meaning for the rest of us. Can anyone take a line like "I think the Russians love their children too" seriously?

It's a record that's pleasant and great fun at times, but it treads water more than it pushes forward. Sting has learnt new things and he's keen to show them off, but it's all somehow a little insular.

Nigel Wrench

● This column will appear twice monthly.

Gloom beneath the jacarandas

If you thought Pretorians a dour Puritanical lot, you want to see them now — it's gloom and despondency everywhere (well, in the white half of the city, anyway).

But then, ag shame, hey, imagine how you would feel trying to run a country in a state like South Africa is in today. Certainly mood-wise, "white" Pretoria is cons away from the heady days following the 1984 referendum result.

Under the circumstances, one would think that when those in the corridors of power went out for an evening's entertainment they would want happiness and cheer — but no, instead one finds more gloom and despondency.

Certainly, anyone who is a regular patron of Pretoria's State Theatre must surely have become aware of the extent to which Pact's productions have recently included an overly-heavy dose of sombre-type plays (over half have fallen into this category in the past 11 months).

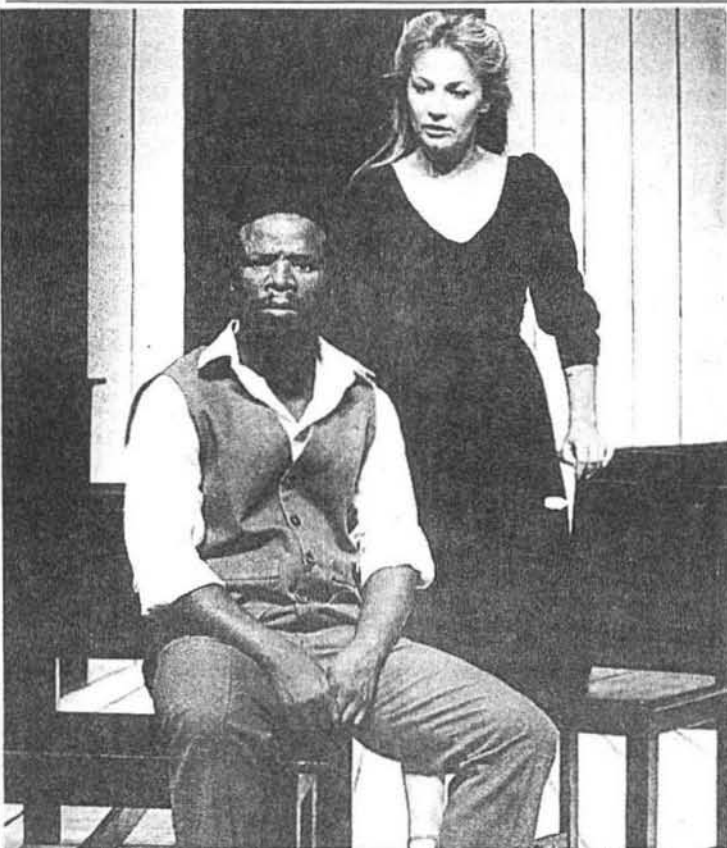
Most striking has been the increasingly visible influence of an existentialist-pessimism underlying the choice of what has been selected for presentation. This has taken the form of:

The anguish of the country hangs heavy over the capital city. Worse, its hangs even heavier over the capital city's art, reports ERIC LOUW

•Pinteresque-type American existentialist plays which deal with the meaninglessness of contemporary life, naturally from a decontextualised and individualistic perspective.

In other words, Western civilisation's contemporary crises, instead of being seen as macro social problems, are transformed into the micro problems faced by individuals (so that these are understood as "personal problems" rather than as deeper societal problems), and hence an explanation of the contemporary social malaise is sidestepped.

In this category one finds plays like "Other Places", "Full Hookup" and "Glengarry Glen Ross".



John Kani and Sandra Prinsloo are on their way to the Edinburgh Festival with the local version of "Miss Julie". Before leaving they are returning to the Market Theatre for three performances only. The shows are on August 12, 20 and 21 at 6pm.

From Cezanne to a wrapped bridge

THIS exhibition of drawings, watercolours, oils and sculpture has been arranged in association with James Goodman Gallery and Jeanne Frank Fine Art, both of New York. Because the collection spans nearly a century, it provides a stylistic summary of the period.

Starting in the "beginning", the drawings and watercolours by Cezanne, Pissarro, Signac, Marchand, Matisse and Picasso reflect a *joie de vivre* and a gentle virtuosity.

"Le Livre" (1924) by Juan Gris is unusual, but lacks the intellectual and spiritual depth of his earlier Cubist paintings.

Kurt Schwitters' work is seldom seen in South Africa. Although never admitted to the Berlin Club Dada, Schwitters is regarded by some as the purest exponent of the Dada spirit of Germany.

The three collages are characteristic — iconoclastic, humorous and serious, made of discarded pieces of paper. "Merz no 30" refers to his own invented word (perhaps derived from Commerzbank) and the *merz* for which he is famous.

Some works of the 1980s give an idea of overseas trends.

EXHIBITION: Cezanne to Chia
The Goodman Gallery

Mick Moon's two large monotypes with mixed media collage ("Through a Glass" and "Rain Forest") are rich and dense with layers of paper and paint, the "imagery" being provided by decorative parts of an ornate frame.

Sandro Chia's drawings belong to an ancient Mediterranean tradition, even though he calls one of them "Anti-classic Drawing". His large predominantly red and green painting is neo-Fauve.

Karel Appel, one of the great figures of elemental expressionism during the second half of this century, continues in his recent acrylics (1984) to combine brilliant colour with gestural brushstroke.

The very antithesis of this manner is represented by Frank Stella (Rzochow, 1973); hard-edged shapes are cut out of fabric and placed against a background of paint and a regular grid. The work is reminiscent of Stella's large, painted aluminium works of the

•Russian (pre-revolutionary) existential plays such as "Chekhov in Yalta" and "Uncle Vanya".

•Some South African dabblings into the gloomy realms of the futility of human existence (which is such a favourite hobbyhorse of existentialists anyway).

In this category have been "Pa, Maak vir my n'Vlieer, Pa" and "The Minotaur's Sister", and even, in a way, "Daar Leef Mense Daar".

The common underlying theme of many of PACT's presentations has then been the sort of anguished questioning relating to themes like "what is life all about?" and "why is this happening to me?"

Of course, none of this anguish is made directly applicable to the South African situation through the plays themselves.

But then, such a de-contextualisation of problems is characteristic of the existentialist world view anyway. Such decontextualisation helps to cushion those feeling the tension, since it gives them the impression that what they are feeling is part of a "universal" human problem, rather than a specific and real problem which they need to confront in their own back yard.

This also, of course, helps them to distance themselves from any responsibility for the situation as it is. It also facilitates their "withdrawing inwards" instead of confronting reality.

In this regard, it should be noted that when plays have been presented that supposedly deal with South Africa, they have mostly skirted the real current issues; dealt with historical problems only tenuously related to current problems; or made us laugh about the situation (but not in a way that hurts, as would occur with a good satire).

Thus Pretorians have been treated to "En die Son Skyn in Suid-Afrika" and to Pieter-Dirk Uys's "Total Onslaught 1984". Amusing they may have been, but neither really forced the audience to consider South Africa as it really is.

Then there was "Amandla Mr Fassbinder" which, although it sounded as if it would seriously address some real, current South African problems, turned out to be almost wholly "European" in flavour. In fact, except for the word "amandla" and what turned out to be the almost incidental appearance in it of a supposed ANC "terrorist", it had virtually no feel of Africa in it, and certainly never got to grips with current South African problems.

Regarding the South African works of "Die Tweede Dood van Robey Leibbrandt" and "Via Castiglione", one must note that both dealt with historical (Second World War) themes, rather than today's reality. And if "Robey Leibbrandt" has a "message" for today, it was one that in any case complemented the current thinking dominant within the National Party, since it questioned "radical Afrikaner nationalism" rather than the (still in vogue) "nationalism" per se. Were the current war in Namibia dealt with in the same way as "Via Castiglione" dealt with its Second World War theme, this would indeed be a step forward for South African theatre.

Agreed, the above ideas are highly impressionistic and even based on a somewhat selective look at PACT's recent Pretoria fare. But could they perhaps tell us at least something about the mood of white Pretoria?

Eric Louw

1970s in which the boundaries between painting and sculpture no longer exist.

For me the highlight of the exhibition is Bulgarian-born Christo's "Le Pont Neuf". This artist has wrapped anything from a bicycle to a skyscraper and now, after a nine-year battle, has finally been granted permission to cloak the oldest bridge in Paris (1578-1607) in 40,000m² of cloth. The giant parcel, costing Ffr18million (R4,2-million) opens on September 23 for two weeks.

The proposal and documentation which is on this exhibition (in two parts) was created last year. It includes a photograph, a copy of an old drawing, constructional details and measurements, as well as an image of the bridge wrapped in fabric, with string, drawn shadows and a superb rendering of the environs in colour.

The South African public is dependent on the efforts of a few commercial galleries for contact with the work of overseas artists. The Goodman Gallery has once again assembled a fine collection for our edification and appreciation.

Marilyn Martin

If nothing about South Africa is really funny, then why do our stand-up comedians get such big laughs?

Pretty fly for a black guy

South African Ronnie Modimola has been performing stand-up comedy since 1997. He is fast becoming a well-known face on the growing comedy circuit in the country and last Saturday was seen at the Sun City Superbowl in *Laughter Blaster*, a major gathering of just about every local comedian worth his salt.

Modimola's routines are, however, in sharp contrast to the country's standard comedy fare, a profession dominated largely by disillusioned white males.

Were you always very funny?

I remember when I was young, when I was able to see things my way, when I would talk people would start laughing.

What does it mean to see things your way?

Understanding things you're looking at. Understanding things that I am seeing — without having to get a second opinion.

Tell me a joke.

The first time I went to a comedy club, audiences were not used to the idea of a black comedian so I told them that the colour that they see on black people is not what was initially intended. It's one of those acts of God — after creating one of us God put the guy in an oven, then God went out to check other things.

He was gone for a few hours and when he came back it was too late. He said, "Oh my God, the man is overcooked." But because he was God he said: "Oh my Me! Shit, look his hair is fucked," so to make up for it he gave black people rhythm.

What are you trying to achieve by confronting your audience with the reality of race in this country?

Somewhere I hope that what I say might bring whites, blacks, coloureds and Indians together.

But are you really attempting to bring people together, or is it an attempt to point out to your largely white audience what the problems of racism are? Are you really on a goodwill mission?

I am on a goodwill mission; it's just that sometimes people take things too seriously. Making people laugh should not be such a big deal. As a black stand-up comedian the audience expects me to play a black man.

The jokes that get a standing ovation are jokes that look down on me as a black person, which I don't care much about — a joke is a joke. But I wanted to get to that point where a black comedian is looked at as a comedian and not just as a black man joking.

Isn't there a contradiction in that? I don't necessarily think that you're out to bond with your audience. I don't think that by walking on stage with a whole lot of supposedly stolen car stereos you're saying, "I'm a nice black man".

It's not that I'm advocating crime. The message I'm sending is that it's a funny country and let's laugh about it. I'm not saying that only



Ronnie Modimola: 'Nothing is not funny for me.' PHOTOGRAPH: MARK GREENBERG

black people steal car radios.

There's this joke I do about dating black girls. You know what they say, too much of one thing is not good so now I want to try it out with a white girl. I have actually tried it out but it did not work.

I paid her a visit, her mother went to the bathroom to throw up. The sound I could hear from the bathroom was "blaaack, blaaack". I could get the message. She didn't have to make it that obvious.

The way I look at audiences in South Africa — audiences I have worked for — I think they still need a bit of education about comedy. Take it for what it is, take it for what it stands for.

Isn't that an easy device for pulling audiences? The particular routine you do isn't just comedy, it's confrontational.

Well they shouldn't go to comedy clubs to judge comedians. They should go to comedy clubs to enjoy themselves. But right now we can't move away from race.

You know, they say that a person who plays the piano is a pianist, but Michael Schumacher, on the other hand is a racing car driver, but he's not called a racist.

Do you do any work other than comedy?

At the moment I'm doing nothing but comedy.

Are you earning a living?

I am earning a little living.

If I asked you to stand up on stage and tell jokes until you can't speak any longer how long could you go for?

Forty minutes. I have plenty of jokes that I have not tried out on an audience. Some I've tried on an audience and they're not that funny they still need work. Maybe they were funny, but not that funny.

What isn't funny?

You mean for me? What isn't funny for me?

No, generally, in the world.

I can't think of anything at the moment.

Nothing is not funny, for me.

Ronnie Modimola spoke to Matthew Krouse

White men can't joke

Matthew Krouse

Anyone who was around in the Sixties couldn't possibly forget the local variety stage show called *Wait a Minute* that played to packed houses at Johannesburg's Intimate theatre before touring abroad. It kick-started a trend of self-serving paths in indigenous white humour.

One would be hard-pressed to find a South African over 30 who doesn't remember the show's star, Jeremy Taylor, or his mega-hit of the era, *Ag Pleez Daddy*, sung from the point of view of a kid begging his father to take his family of 10 to the drive-in. The point was that middle-lower class whites had bad taste and no money.

It was a sort of musical version of the cartoon Flip Foster that once poked fun at suburbia, nudging whites off their pedestals, and it seems to have set a precedent from which local comedy has never quite recovered.

More than a decade later, with the advent of television in the late Seventies, came another major comedy moment — *Biltong and Pot Roast* — a studio competition that harped on the cultural differences between English and Afrikaans-speakers.

Today, it seems that we have come full circle. A live-comedy boom is currently taking the suburbs by storm. Comedy venues seem to be springing up in all the comfort zones — places like Randburg's Funny Farm, Hurricanes in the Fourways Mall and Stars Studio in Pretoria's Sheraton Hotel.

Last Saturday saw an exemplary gathering of the cream of the current comedy crop



Big gun: John Vlismas

at the Sun City Superbowl called *Laughter Blaster*. It included both newcomers and a smattering of old names who have risen from some hysterical oblivion.

Packed with over a thousand spectators, South Africa once again giggled and guffawed at Mel Miller, Eddie Eckstein and Cyril Green, gentlemen now more portly but no less vociferous than they were when they graced the small screen of the old SABC.

The re-emergence of these stalwarts brings the development of the local sense of humour into sharp focus. Today, these old boks seem to reek of some hectic disenchantment. And this has left them stoning some very old cows. Eckstein, for example, seems to never have recovered from the problems that affected the health sector under Minister Nkosazana Zuma. Zuma, he said, stands for "Zero understanding of medical affairs," and that the minister now does the work of two men: Laurel and Hardy.

That is the basic tone of what our comedy veterans have to offer — that, and an inevitable lambasting of the petty criminals on the city streets. It combines with pessimism about the state of the country in general, leading Miller to comment: "What a country — we've got the greatest Constitution in the world. You can do anything you want to as long as you're not smoking when you're doing it."

As far as the new comedy troopers go, the coming of fresh blood hasn't necessarily brought with it new attitudes. However sexy, brash and rude these guys may be, they're borderline sexists — fortunate for them because in comedy it's considered healthy to break down taboos. The word "poes" gets used with abandon. John Vlismas suggested dropping a panty-liner on flooded Mozambique. Al Prodders said bras come in four sizes: "Small, medium, large and hallelujah!"

In my opinion, the current comedy road show has only two barrier-breaking acts in it. The one is the *The House Boys* who do a lip-synch and mime routine that could challenge contemporary performance practitioners anywhere in the world. Their act is off-beat and surreal, they don't objectify women or come across as maladjusted whites unable to come to terms with a country that has changed.

The other is Ronnie Modimola, one of the few black voices in stand-up comedy, whose work seems to invert all the stereotypes currently gracing the stage today. As Modimola says, he's not into comedy because he's trying to be white: "Why would I want to use a penis enlarger for the rest of my life?"

See veteran comedian Joe Parker's comedy hurricane at Stars Studio Exclusive Super Club every Wednesday night from 8.30pm. Comedians include Parker, Martin Jonas, Magic Man, Alyn Adams, *The House Boys*, Trevor Sturgess, Robert Fridjohn, Cyril Green, John Vlismas, Chris Forrest, Ronnie Modimola, Ryan Whittal and Mel Miller. For information Tel: (012) 342-3313

One corrupt night

Stephen Gray

Midway through Michael Frayn's eloquent, passionate play *Copenhagen*, one wonders if there could possibly be anything further to be talked through. Two Nobel Prize-winning nuclear physicists, the Danish Niels Bohr and his former German assistant Werner Heisenberg, have batted out how their theories of uncertainty of complementarity and quanta have intersected, diverged. They have shown how canny academic papers may lead to chairs, how their colleagues (all Jews) may have unwittingly risen Nazi gentiles.

What is more, they have discovered that matter the size of a tennis ball might just commence the destruction of the planet.

But Frayn has Bohr's wonderful wife Margrethe — strong-jawed in the photo, and sternly played by Jennifer Steyn — watching over them. On our behalf she comments on how the lads misremember their breakthroughs. Although they awesomely opened the universe between them in the 1930s, they now are becoming sworn antagonists. Bohr will defect to Britain to build the bomb that Heisenberg wishes will not have to be dropped on himself and his collapsing homeland.

In the devastating second half it seems as if all Frayn's twisted, tortured talk around and about the point has become too solemn to bear. It is just horror unchained. Heisenberg's shoes catch fire with phosphorus and Bohr crawls on his hands and knees down a beach to be smuggled out.

Freighters coming in at night to pick up more Jews. Children starving en masse. Lives worth a packet of Lucky Strike.

Around these images, Frayn's play clusters in a civilised and urbane way, to be sure, hardly ruffled. Dale Cutts patters and ponders well as Bohr; Nicky Rebelo stays suited and urbane as his sidekick. With Margrethe they are trapped on a circular stage, as Maurice Podbrey directs them, replaying that pivotal night in Copenhagen in Autumn 1941 when they almost asked that unfathomable question: is there any morality at all in nuclear fission? *Hamlet* is the other play set in Copenhagen often referred to, so the message is: corrupt. Corruption always does make for spellbinding theatre.

Copenhagen is on at the Agfa Theatre on the Square in Sandton, Johannesburg, until April 1, before touring to Durban and Cape Town

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THE WEEKLY MAIL
ARTS
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Dance Umbrella ready for another APPENDIX 6

THE 1990 Dance Umbrella will be opened at the end of the month to reveal an exciting, eclectic mix of contemporary dance styles. Over 50 choreographers and dance companies will congregate in Johannesburg for the event which has grown enormously since its modest launch by the Wits Performing Arts Administration last February. It has also acquired a second sponsor: AA Life/Vita, which will present awards in contemporary choreography and dance on the final night of the Umbrella series. The event this year comprises a Main Umbrella and a Fringe. The work, all original pieces by South African choreographers, will be presented in evening performances at

the Wits Theatre from February 28 to March 9, culminating in an all-day Fringe programme on March 10. Several major names in South African choreography have written works for inclusion. Among them: Carly Dibakoane of the Soweto Dance Theatre and Marlene Blom on February 28 and March 2; Adele Blank, Jeanette Ginslov and Sylvia Glasser on March 1 and 3, as well as David Krugel, whose award-winning *After the Rain* will be performed by the Napac Dance Company; Transvaal talents Christopher Kindo, Esther Nasser and Yda Walt on March 6 and 8 and Grayham Davies of the Johannesburg Dance Theatre, Robyn Orlin and Alfred Hinkel of Cape Town's Jazzart on

March 7 and 9. On the Fringe on Saturday, March 10 there will be a variety of contemporary dance forms in the main theatre and amphitheatre at Wits, every hour on the hour from 10am until 6pm. ●The "new look" Pact Dance Company will be introduced to audiences at the Johannesburg Art, Ballet, Drama and Music School on February 24 from 10am to 1.30pm. The event includes a contemporary dance class, followed by rehearsals at which choreographers Esther Nasser and Christopher Kindo will talk about works being presented at Dance Umbrella. To book, telephone Pact at (012) 322-1665, ext 412.

Boycott 'breakthrough' for G'town festival

CULTURAL, community and sports organisations in Grahamstown have given conditional approval to participation in this year's National Festival of the Arts, after two years of boycott threats by progressive organisations. At a meeting convened in Joza township last week by the Grahamstown Cultural Workers' Committee, 1 000 representatives of local groups agreed it was "inappropriate" to call for a boycott of this year's Grahamstown Festival, which begins on June 28. Final approval, however, will depend on the outcome of a national meeting planned for next

The Grahamstown arts festival seems finally to have shaken free of its snow-white image — at least free enough for progressive cultural organisations to call off the boycott

month, bringing together cultural organisations from around the country. In a statement issued this week the CWC listed "local problems" whose resolution would be sought including: "the festival's Eurocentricity, its inaccessibility and its costs, as well

as the issue of free tickets and of not imparting skills to local artists on a year-round basis". The latter two points — free tickets and workshops — were tackled last year by the festival committee in an attempt to make the 10-day event relevant for the local black community. About R12 500-worth of free tickets were distributed through community organisations for last year's festival; workshops were scheduled in movement, fine art, acting and music to run in township venues concurrently with the festival.

These strategies — plus the use of three township venues — were only partly successful. Some of the township shows were attended and others were not; some of the workshops were successful, while others were boycotted. Delegates to last week's meeting accepted the broad concept of free tickets, township venues and workshops. But they noted certain problems with their execution. For example, the meeting agreed to free tickets, but wanted more say in the selection of the shows; they agreed

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Capital pips bangbroek broadcasters to the post

Ten years after it first crackled into life, Capital Radio remains the punchiest station around ... if you're lucky enough to be able to tune into it. By ARTHUR GOLDSTUCK

IT'S five minutes past five on a Saturday afternoon at Capital Radio's HQ in Milpark, Johannesburg. The air is filled with the sound of the German anti-war pop hit *99 Red Balloons*. In the telex room, news editor David O'Sullivan watches the machines intently. Suddenly, one of them chatters to life. "Here it is!" he shouts. Reporter Janet White rushes in, whips the sheet of paper from the telex machine, and dashes for the studio. The song is just ending, and she breaks into the programme with the breathless announcement: "Nelson Mandela is to be freed tomorrow." And so, Capital Radio beats the rest of the South African media to the newshour of the decade. Five minutes later, 702 makes the announcement. Radio Five follows within minutes. At SABC-TV, where TopSport is entertaining part of the nation, there is confusion among the news and sports presenters on how to handle the story. Finally, in one of those ironies that only history will fully appreciate, the announcement is made shortly before six o'clock by sports presenter Hendrik Verwoerd — grandson of Hendrik F Verwoerd, architect of grand apartheid and the man who effectively sent Mandela to jail ... Ironies aside, the SABC's delayed reaction was a textbook example of the state mouth-piece's difficulty in escaping the mental straightjacket imposed by years of *bangbroek* broadcasting. They could take more than a few lessons from Capital Radio. The station was formed 10 years ago as a partnership between private enterprise and the Transkei government. That government, and its successors, proved to be so corrupt, even the South African government did not raise a finger to prevent a military coup in its vassal state. Yet, Capital Radio retained its credibility as one of the most reliable news sources in Southern Africa. Barring a few lean periods, when they experienced a crisis of confidence and (briefly), they have tended to lead the trends in

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Nicky Rebelo returns in the black comedy *The Good Soldier Svejk*, opening at the Laager on March 8. The other cast members are, from left, Barry Burke, Li Newman, Andrew Buckland, Gys de Villiers and Jennie Reznick

Posters with perfect timing — they're history

IT was probably not intended that way but the timing of the one-day exhibition, *Posters in the Struggle Against Apartheid*, organised as part of the Wits History Workshop Open Day last Saturday, was perfect. The posters on show — for the most part protest posters produced by trade unions and cultural collectives with roots in the democratic movement — were collected and shown at almost the same moment that they ceased to be living propaganda and entered the more reflective if less vocal realms of history. The release of Nelson Mandela was announced that day and would happen on the following day. The African National Congress, technically unbanned for more than a week, was about to emerge decisively into the light of South African day. In that historically overwhelming moment not only the posters calling for Mandela's release and the unbanning of the liberation movement turned overnight into relics of the struggle. The particular use of the poster medium was also changed into something belonging to a remembered past more than to the living present.

'Struggle' posters on exhibition at the Gertrude Posel gallery underwent an unexpected change of status on opening day when the news of Nelson Mandela's release turned some of them into instant relics. IVOR POWELL reports

South African realities have changed more dramatically and more suddenly than anybody could have imagined. Where formerly the struggle for democracy was guided by relatively abstract issues relating to morality and justice, now we are entering a new era in which the issues are practical and increasingly complex. In the past the struggle was to get to the point where the problems of South African life — which now need to be worked through — were merely acknowledged and addressed. In terms of information and publicity in the liberation movement — of which poster making formed a central part — this meant that issues and events needed to be located within a moral dimension. The rights and wrongs of

what was happening in the country were what guided poster making as much as they did anti-apartheid media practice in general. But now, the white heat of indignation is cooling. And new and different functions need to be developed for the information and propaganda machinery of the liberation movement. The posters on show were for the most part unashamedly propagandist. They were made in order to persuade and to mobilise, and their appeal was thus to a mass audience. Given this kind of purpose, "art" hardly comes into it — though of course the hand and eye skills which make for art do. Propaganda posters are successful insofar as they distil and dramatically persuade their viewer. Conversely, they fail insofar as they contain within themselves doubts or ambiguities. In the propaganda sense, many of the finest posters on show are those which were produced under the auspices of the trade union movement. Often employing photographic imagery and coupling this with hard sloganising, they offer direct and immediately emotive argu-

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THE ARTS

APPENDIX 7

Sad-eyed lady at the edge of time

Late on Saturday night, when the crowds have crept off to bed, singer Jennifer Ferguson finds time to talk to
LESLEY LAWSON

IT'S late, late Saturday night at Club 58. The crowds have crept off to bed, leaving their stale cigarette and perfume smells. The people who remain are either Jennifer Ferguson fans, or unsuspecting drunks.

"Tell us about the suburbs, honey," shouts someone from the kitchen. And she does. With her chilling "Suburbia Hum" she creates a nightmare childhood garden in the half-empty club. There's the "smell of rotting peaches thick on the ground, and the pink-bodied children making shrieking sounds".

The paunchy man who had earlier been trying to draw her attention with calls of *boeremeisie* is completely silenced. Some of us sip our drinks a bit faster.

Who is this sad-eyed lady on the edge of her own time?

Some critics refer to her as "a ray of musical sunshine". Others name her South Africa's brightest new cabaret star.

Some weeks later she tells me about her work, and her thoughts...

LL: I am particularly interested in the songs of the suburbs — "Suburbia Hum" and "The best things in life come free". Have you written any more of them?

JF: I'd say "Suburbia Hum" is the most articulate of them. I wrote it attempting to make some sort of statement. But I don't want to do songs that can only be classed as protest songs. Of course, if what you are intending to communicate is protest, then everything necessarily has to have elements of it.

You even find you can take a song and do it in a musical way, without even putting words to it, to make a melodic protest. That's what I would like to explore more. To attempt to find a way of musically creating something that has a very strong disturbing element to it.

LL: How does the audience relate to these songs?

JF: I've had an interesting response ... some very aggressive responses. People write me letters and that kind of thing.

White paranoia is something.

I'm no ardent fan when it comes to any political structure or system. I'm not optimistic. In fact I could be classed as a dire pessimist. Because in terms of the whole workings of humanity, I perceive a very negative picture, where I don't see very much hope in anything. I think we will just blow ourselves up.

LL: The nuclear threat?

JF: Yes, but the nuclear threat is just part of the whole. I see very little value or meaning in the way people live their lives today, really.

And you get people with shiny eyes — maybe a born-again Christian, or a person that's just come out of jail and has a vision that makes his face shine with belief and confidence in the future.... It's great. I mean it's great for them.

For me, myself, I can't say that it has any meaning, and that's why I find it difficult to put in a chorus that says I still have hope, or we must still believe in things.

You know Barney Simon said to me recently, now is the time of great happenings, and I sense it, I feel it. But when you have a period of great change you have great conflict. And when you are a part of that conflict you will always have the shadows and the light of it.

The musos don't work together. I would love to be able to, but that's not what the whole apartheid ballgame's all about. It's basically succeeded in creating total ignorance, and preventing a potentially fantastic development in the arts here. It's made that impossible.

Honesty is, I think, the most important thing, and I have gibness, above all things.

And it's difficult not to be glib, I suppose because everything has been said before. Even reading the young Brecht — the poems he was writing when he was 21, 22, I have such a strong identification with.

And yet look at what he was writing at 55. It's a different man. He could write with an open heart about the USSR, that kind of thing,



Just Jennifer ... South Africa's ray of musical sunshine

Picture: LESLEY LAWSON

But we can't really do that today. There's no system that is offering a solution, and that is the tragedy.

LL: Do you think a "system" can offer a solution?

JF: Look, whatever the system, for me it's something you impose. The underground rivers of chaos will always exist because they flow in every person.

For me, though, the average person, especially the average white South African, is living a life that has been so sterilised, so paralysed by their way of thinking ... and the things they have been fed, and the television box in their lounge, and the things they want in their lives, and the things they fear in their lives.

LL: What interests me is that those very same people come to listen to you sing. How do they handle what you are saying to them, or do they just not listen?

JF: No, they do listen, they do listen. I know that is the one thing inside of me, that when I focus, when I channel all my energy into pulling people, I can make them listen. It's a very strange power to have.

Depending on their level of inebriation, some will fight me. But if I've got the microphone I'm usually at an advantage.

But of course when you say these kind of things you kind of want things to change, you want things to happen.

LL: Tell me about this Brecht performance in November.

Sizwe Banzi is alive again

"SIZWE Banzi is Dead", the play by Athol Fugard, John Kani and Winston Mshona, will have three performances at the Box Theatre in support of the Felicity de Jager Benefit Fund.

Fresh from its most recent run on the Grahamstown Festival Fringe, "Sizwe", with Paul Luruli and Jeremiah Mofokeng, will play at the Box on the Wits University campus today and tomorrow at 8pm with a matinee performance at 3.30pm on Saturday.

JF: Well, it's songs, and we've tried to find pieces of Brecht's writing that can be used as well.

LL: Why did you choose Brecht?

JF: I've always liked him. He's written an extraordinary amount of stuff, and the composers he worked with are also very interesting — Eisler, Dessau and Kurt Weill.

Musically, it's challenging. They were the more experimental, more *avant garde* composers, doing things with atonal, dissonant sounds which were unheard of in those times.

LL: What else have you got lined up for this year?

JF: There's 58 in August. I'm looking forward to it because they're pulling a diverse audience — you get a lot of gay people there, I think, a lot of women. I like it a lot. I like to feel that women think there's somebody singing in their voice now. I think that's important.

But I'm also quite apprehensive about it.

If you are doing five nights a week singing, it can be heavy. Those are killers, boy. At least with the Brecht thing you know people are going to shut up and listen.

I'd like to work predominantly with original material, but it's a slow process, coming up with the right songs and feeling good enough about numbers to do them. I couldn't do a programme of my own stuff at a place like 58. People would have indigestion, they'd get depressed, they wouldn't eat — they'd just drink.

Portraits towards a mythology of change

EXHIBITION: A FEW SOUTH AFRICANS
Market Gallery

ONE of the really sordid things about working as a critic is that it is so much more fun writing bad reviews than good ones. Sarcasm and wit neighbours on the lower end of the wit spectrum are quite simply more satisfying and generate better copy than gentle inversions.

I confess therefore to a certain anticipatory tingle when it was suggested that I write a piece on the portfolio "A Few South Africans" by Sue Williamson, currently showing at the Market Gallery. "OK," I said somewhat gleefully, "I'll do it. But don't expect me to be nice about the show."

Here was an opportunity to show off, to be really nasty. I had seen three of the graphics from the portfolio on the BMW show earlier this year, and in that context they had seemed sterile and joyless products of the kind of white guilt that assumes that any kind of visual intelligence is by definition reactionary and that the true revolutionary strategy as regards art should be to make it as dull, sloganising and bureaucratic as possible.

I mention all this partly because it will make me feel a bit better to eat my prejudices in public, and partly because it points to the importance of distinguishing between the individual graphics and the portfolio as a whole.

Looked at on their own, the individual graphics are neither very interesting nor very resonant. More or less standardised in format, they are typically dominated by a photographically screened portrait of the particular person, usually seen from fairly close-up.

Behind this portrait, in a very deep space, there are little etched details depicting incidents from the person's life — as rendered in terms of their significance for the history of the struggle for a free South Africa.

All of this is framed inside a decorative and suggestively architectonic border, which has its source in framing techniques used by people at Crossroads; the decoration is used in a semi-symbolic way (a la Judy Chicago) in order to speak through shape or motif about the people being portrayed.

At a purely visual level it doesn't quite come off. The borders are often so removed from the subject that they do little more than add pretty colour to a basically monochromatic image.

In other instances they are literal to the point of outright ponderousness. Mamphele Ramphele, for example, a medical doctor who, finding herself banished to a resettlement area, encouraged the people to erect buildings and grow vegetables — and who at various times had been harassed by the Security Police — is represented against a design of bricks, handcuffs, vegetables and stethoscopes.

Neither does the narrative detail really serve to integrate the pictures into convincing and autonomous artworks. Because it cannot be allowed to obtrude, it tends to be sketchy and merely to refer to rather than to narrate the particular incident. Because it is rendered in a bland and documentary style, it evokes no empathetic response from the viewer.

Now all of this would be damning enough if visual autonomy were the point. But of course it's not. The portfolio comes complete with a series of biographical notes on the women represented, and when seen in conjunction with these notes becomes truly moving.

The images themselves are transfigured in the realisation that these are not conventional representations but, in fact, icons. They serve not to interpret the world in which we live but to give a visual focus for an experience of awe.

"The struggle" in this country, has, for all the unease this causes cynics like myself, the character of a holy war; what Sue Williamson has done is to create images of its saints.

They will persuade nobody. What they will do, both through detail and through abstraction, is to provide pictures for mythologies of change in this country.

Ivor Powell

ARTS

Have you driven an Ellis Park concert lately?

IT'S hard to be a fan of live music when you can't get closer than half a kilometre from the stage and you have to rely on the giant overhead video monitor which constantly interrupts the entertainment BONGANI NGWENYA PLEASE MEET JERRY AT THE COKE CARAVAN... URGENT!!! with personal messages scrolling across the screen.

It's probably equally hard to be a stage announcer when your voice has to compete with TV adverts that drown you out every time you try speaking to the crowd.

And it must be even harder if you're the camera operator and ATTENTION MICHELLE COLLINS!!! MEET JENNY AT THE COKE CARAVAN! URGENT!!! the crowd at the back expects you to be at the centre of the action at every moment. It's not your fault you can't find the lead singer in your viewfinder, so why are they getting so aggro?

Worst of all RYAN STERNBERG MEET DAVID AT THE COKE CARAVAN must be if you're in charge of security, especially in the

Last weekend's Bigger Birthday Concert at Ellis Park was a commercial triumph, with about 80 000 people attending. But it takes more than a crowd to make a good concert, as ARTHUR GOLDSTUCK discovered

VIP section. How the hell were you supposed to know it was the PRO for the concert you just threw out? All these free beers you've been drinking would hamper anyone's judgment...

If it was hard ATTENTION: SIPHWE LOOKS FOR GIVEN LEBETHE, COKE CARAVAN!!!! for the commoners and the non-playing VIPs, then the stars of the day didn't have it easy either.

Mango Groove, whose tight stage act incorporates an atmospheric build-up, found that build-up ruined by zealous TV operators trying to cram adverts in until LIKE A TRUE NATURE'S CHILD WE WERE BORN TO BE WILD!

BORN TO BE WILD! HAVE YOU DRIVEN A FORD LATELY? the moment the band took the stage. They went a step further when Prophets of the City arrived, playing an ad over the opening number.

Communications breakdowns between stage and TV ops room were blamed. Perhaps the TV ops room should reconsider their apparent policy of employing the blind and the deaf.

That would also have averted the intensely annoying habit of filling the screen with the message ELLIS PARK WELCOMES... for the first few minutes of every act. When it came to ELLIS PARK WELCOMES LUCKY DUBE, the message returned, inexplicably, for almost the full duration of the reggae man's last number.

So much for the TV operators. What was ATTENTION KASSANDRA AND BRETT: JUANITA IS AT THE COKE CARAVAN!!! the music like?

Mango Groove were competent, with fresh stage choreography and a verve that just doesn't seem to fade. But, perhaps, it's time they trotted out more of their new material. The danger exists that they begin treating local concerts as dress rehearsals for their international expeditions.

Marcalex are in much the same danger; they can only do so much polishing and polishing of their act before people start demanding LERACOMOFISA: MEET PERCY AT THE COKE CARAVAN!!!! something new.

Yvonne Chaka Chaka, who has received a marketing boost unprecedented on the African continent, made little impact on Doornfontein. She can't seem to decide whether she's the princess of ersatz protest pop or South Africa's answer to Whitney Houston. The video screen seemed to agree. As she sang out, "Amandla Awethu! I'm fighting for my right to be free," to a bouncy mbaqanga beat, the words flashed up: IGNORE THE LAST MESSAGE!!

The true highlight of the concert was the performer who had come to take crowds' adulation for granted. By last year this time, his performances had become so lacklustre, they were devoid of any credibility.

This year's souped-up edition of Siph "Hotstix" Mabuse was Cred epitomised. His anthem to the toyi-toying masses, *Chant of the Marching*, took on a relevance it could never have on record when it brought the crowd to their feet — toyi-toying as if their lives depended on it.

This reaction was characteristic of a new spirit

at Ellis Park. In the past, LEE IS LOOKING FOR IAN AND JOE AT THE COKE CARAVAN... URGENT!!! political statements have not been received with great enthusiasm at city-slicker concerts.

Yet, on Saturday, even Mzwakhe's heavy-handed, sloganistic performance poetry seemed to strike a chord with the crowd. They cheered him almost as loudly as they did Brenda Fassie's of much voice and little substance.

As Mzwakhe put it himself, "This is different poetry... this is a different recipe." But by and large, most groups fell into one or another category of Afro-pop. Refreshing exceptions were Steve Louw's Big Sky, with its sound as big and optimistic as the band's name and rap newcomers Prophets of the City.

"We believe POC is the voice of the township the voice of South Africa," said the lead rapper decked out in traditional American rap-style "baseball-bondage. Unfortunately, the sound system PIET BESTER MEET YOUR SISTE AT THE COKE CARAVAN... URGENT!!! wasn't designed to cope with the clarity demanded by rap, but they produced a convincing and entertaining set nonetheless.

Talking of which, the most convincing display of passionate conviction came from the gang of Barney Simon fans who carried around a lovingly-crafted banner reading BARNEY IS WANKER.

Steve Hofmeyer in his pre-torn jeans gave his best; so did the Passengers, playing to the grumpy, rain-sodden early arrivals; and so did Chimora, a delightful find, reminiscent of the early Mahotella Queens.

The best vote of confidence in the music was the staying power of the fans. They did not desert the usual and depart en masse after Mango Groove. Nor after Hotstix, nor after Marcalex. They may well have gathered around the Coke caravan, by now a seething mass of people waiting for their friends (URGENT!!!), and thus giving the illusion of a large audience.

Or they may have been waiting for Mahlathini — evidence of the fact that South Africans are taking to the old groaner as enthusiastically as the Europeans have done. As the man left, so did the crowd.

When No Friends of Harry took the stage, they found they had no friends left in the crowd. But perhaps that's just because the Coke caravan has closed for the night.



Anxious as anything... Harrison Ford might be guilty of murder in *Presumed Innocent*

Harrison at his histrionic best

FILM: *Presumed Innocent*
DIRECTOR: Alan J Pakula

FOR once it helps not to have read the book. For while the Scott Turow novel (which I understand to be excellent) on which the film is based is infinitely more than a mere whodunnit, an element of mystery is integral to the plot. I, for one, was delighted not to have had my enjoyment impaired by advance knowledge of the identity of the killer.

The question is whether or not the killing of Caroline Polhemus (Greta Scacchi) was the work of the harassed protagonist, prosecutor Rusty Dabich (Harrison Ford), angry and frustrated that his extra-marital affair with her had come to an end.

If you have not yet read the book, I shall leave you to discover the answer, as I did, in the last reel. If you have read it, I am sure you will find plenty to divert you in the finely delineated performances and in the skilful, sensitive way the relentless, searching exposition is handled by

Alan J Pakula who, ever since *Sophie's Choice*, has ranked among my favourite directors.

Ford is at his histrionic best. One finds oneself concerned for him even as the mounting evidence against him puts in question one's own presumption of his innocence.

And, in the best tradition of the ensemble, Ford's performance is beautifully complemented by those of Brian Dennehy as Chief Prosecuting Attorney Raymond Horgan, concerned colleague or smarmy tergiversator; Bonnie Bedelia as Sabich's wife, Barbara, hurt by her husband's infidelity, but staunchly supportive nevertheless; Raul Julia as the wily defence attorney, Alejandro "Sandy" Stern, matching strategy against his own doubts of his client's innocence, and Paul Winfield as the tough but humorous Judge Larren Lytle, a respected jurist with a less-than-immaculate history.

Presumed Innocent tells an engrossing story with intelligence and verve. A must for the discerning filmgoer.

Raeford Daniel

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Tusk Records expand into classical music

THE importance of expanding the market for classical music in South Africa was emphasised by popular broadcaster Michael Letellier, classical music repertoire consultant for Tusk Records, announcing the company's move into the classical music field on compact disc.

"It is shameful that classical recordings occupy a statistical average of only eight percent in South Africa, along with the UK and United States. In Europe it is more like 13 to 14 percent.

"Music is taught at too few schools. Music education is expensive. Among blacks is there any teaching at all? Can choral, traditional or ethnic music influence the young to appreciate the finest product of Western civilisation? Does casual exposure to TV and films convert many? Is the SABC doing what it should? Are newspapers doing enough?"

ROCK/POP

Armatrading shows some emotion

JOAN ARMATRADING — *Hearts and Flowers* (A&M)
ON *Hearts and Flowers*, Queen Joan shows quite a bit more emotion than on her last couple of LPs. It for the most part has the warmth and passion of her earliest albums, though marred somewhat by the blandly synthesised backing.

Hearts and Flowers is uneven, but the good numbers are truly superb: *More than One Kind of Love* is a great, wise, strong, moving song, almost on a par with classics like *Love and Affection* and *Willow*. *Free* comes close, and *Promise Land* could go on *To the Limit* (a personal favourite) without incongruity.

LLOYD COLE (Polydor)
THIS first solo LP from *The Commotions'* former chief is easily as good as his first with that band — an album that was pure pop and none the worse for it, which is an achievement of great rarity.

Cole has a very seductive voice, a neat lyric touch (frequently on the knife-edge of pretension), and an ear for a good twist to a tune. And, having hired longtime Lou Reed collaborator Fred Maher to co-produce, he hustles through this album with offhand flair.

THE Electric Light Orchestra — *The Very Best of* (Epic); Jeff Lynne — *Armchair Theatre* (Warner Bros/Tusk)

GEORGE MARTIN and The Beatles thought of "orchestral rock" — as in rock songs with pseudo-classical additions — before Jeff Lynne did, but that didn't stop HIM, oh no.

Coinciding with the new Lynne solo LP is a double album of ELO hits, and the whole lot sounds like an overblown rip-off of *A Day in the Life*, without the irony.

Lynne is a tunesmith of skill, and possibly an arranger of talent: *Armchair Theatre* indicates that



DISCONNECTION SHAUN DE WAAL

a lot of *The Travelling Wilburys'* sound was his. But there, somehow, his tendency toward kitsch was restrained: here it is rampant. No matter how simply pleasing or neat a song is, Lynne always adds that extra flourish, a heavenly choir, a second obsequious hook, or another coat of production varnish. It can make you ill.

LUTHER VANDROSS — *The Best of Love* (Epic)

HERE come all those Luther Vandross adjectives again: silky, sensuous, swooshy. But Vandross is not all opulent nouveau soul; there's a funky side there somewhere, but I think it's taken some downers. It hurls more sentimentally in numbers like *Bad Boy Having a Party*, but two whole sides of *The Best of Love*, meaning Luther's hits, is a bit too much for me. Okay, he's going as a balladeer, and according to Dionne Warwick's plug on the inside cover he has a *Voice*. But I think it's quite bland, and his love songs only a tad less irritating than Lionel Richie's. Vandross was made to be a backing, not a leading, vocalist.

Two new (ish) releases worth trying are *The Hothouse Flowers' Home* (London Records) and *John Hiatt's Stolen Moments* (A&M).

Some not worth bothering about are *Speak Softly Love* (RPM) by Trevor Nasser, who sounds like Richard Clayderman on a guitar, Gene Rockwell's *One Love One Lifetime* (Rocksteady) and Mariah Carey's debut LP, titled, well I never, *Mariah Carey* (CBS). It is my belief that they only do this so that reviewers and hit parade will give the name twice — unless it's pure lack of imagination.

(An onomastic curiosity: one of the members of Dutch band BZN — out here courtesy of a supermarket chain — glories in the extraordinary name of Dik Plat. By the way, their music is disgusting.)

Simply smashing

The Smashing Pumpkins were inspired by metal in a digital age to create a sound that, after their current tour, will be laid to rest

Riaan Wolmarans

I was very disappointing when, a few years ago, the Smashing Pumpkins were on their way to South Africa — and the concerts were cancelled. Then the band announced their break-up this year, and it seemed we were destined to miss out on yet another already legendary rock band, just like we'll never see The Pixies or Nirvana perform here.

Luckily, 5fm kept to its promise of big names for the Edgars 5fm 25th Birthday Concert on November 11, and Billy Corgan and company will be headlining the day's celebrations, along with British rockers James and local luminaries Springbok Nude Girls, Boo!, Fetish and a posse of top DJs from Reality in Jo'burg. They also play in Durban at the Westridge Stadium on November 12 and in Cape Town at the Big Arena on November 14.

The multiple award-winning Pumpkins have been travelling on an intense and fast-paced road to fame ever since Corgan got together with guitarist James Iha, forming the Pumpkins in 1991, at first comprising only the two of them with a drum machine. Later that year drummer Jimmy Chamberlin joined and bassist D'Arcy was also added to the roster. They were not the Pumpkins we know and love today — Chamberlin described the band at the time as "atrocious".

They started performing and touring more often, and then convinced producer Hutch Vig to help them put together their debut full-length album, *Gish* (named after actress Lillian Gish, who greatly impressed Corgan's grandmother). *Gish* was released at the same time as Nirvana's *Nevermind*, the other project Vig had been working on.

Gish was somewhat overshadowed by Kurt Cobain and his band's smash debut, but nevertheless established the Pumpkins as a force to be reckoned with, leading to the band's first major tour and eventually selling more than 350 000 copies.

Intense deliberation and work had gone into *Gish* in the studio, especially from Corgan — this remained true for all the band's albums thereafter.



Exit stage left: The Smashing Pumpkins are performing in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town — the last chance for local fans to see them

After the long and hectic *Gish* tour, the band started recording *Siamese Dream* (so titled because "we are all living the dream", according to Corgan), but not without problems: Chamberlin became addicted to drugs in this period and suffered an emotional breakdown, Iha and D'Arcy's romantic relationship ended, Corgan was in therapy. Fame and high expectations of the band were taking their toll.

Siamese Dream took five months of meticulous recording and entered the Billboard charts at number 10 in 1993. The ensuing tour impressed critics and fans alike. *Siamese Dream* eventually went four times platinum, selling more than four million copies.

A collection of b-sides, *Pisces Iscariot*, also went platinum. Still, not all was well. Some of

their live performances angered fans, with the band refusing to play any of their well-known songs.

The year 1995 saw the band recording and releasing the magnificent double album *Mellon Collie and Infinite Sadness*, with new producer Flood (reportedly dropping Vig because the band wanted a change, avoiding the sound of past Pumpkins records). *Mellon Collie* entered the Billboard charts at number one, with the first single the killer rock of *Bullet with Butterfly Wings*.

Mellon Collie sold more than eight million units in the United States alone, making it the most successful double album in history.

Also in 1995, Jonathan Melvoin joined the Pumpkins as a touring keyboard player. He was taking more and more drugs with Chamberlin

— and then tragedy struck in 1996. Melvoin died of an overdose; Chamberlin survived but was arrested. This resulted in Chamberlin being fired from the band. On the upside, the Pumpkins won seven MTV Video Awards that year, followed by an American Music Award as well as a Grammy in 1997.

By the end of 1997, Corgan told reporters that *Mellon Collie* was the last album that would sound like the Pumpkins up to that point — the band wanted to explore more electronic sounds. Sure enough, *Adore* in 1998 had a strong electronic element, with drum machines, samples and synths. It made its debut at number two and went platinum, but didn't sell nearly as well as the band hoped — fans seemed to prefer the band's former rock sound. Corgan in turn blamed fans for being disloyal.

Rehabilitated Chamberlin returned to the band in 1999, but the year ended with bassist D'Arcy leaving to pursue other endeavours (Hole's Melissa Auf der Maur will be playing bass). Despite this setback, in 2000 the band released *Machina: The Machines of God*, a finely crafted but ultimately unimpressive concept-type album. Not long after, the band's break-up was announced.

"I've taken pop songwriting as far as it can go," Corgan said in a *Rolling Stone* interview. The Pumpkins released a last full-length album, *Machina II: Friends and Enemies of Modern Music*, in September, but only printed 25 vinyl copies — fans will have to hunt down bootlegs.

While the Pumpkins have given superb and electrifying shows during the last 15 years, they also unexpectedly disappointed at times, giving unimpressive acoustic performances with no hits included, for example. One can only hope that they give their all for what will be one of their very last performances.

A band sure not to disappoint is the other big attraction, the seven-member James from Manchester, with Tim Booth on vocals. James have been rocking for 18 years and have brought out massive pop-rock anthems such as *Sit Down and Laid*.

South Africans Springbok Nude Girls and Boo! (who have both just released new albums) as well as the sublime Fetish never disappoint either — although we have seen these bands so often that they become harder to appreciate.

Tickets for the concerts are available at Ticketweb (www.ticketweb.co.za or Tel: 0861 400500)

A spotlight sweeps in dark corners

Marianne Merten

'Beware, this bitch bites!' says the logo on the T-shirt of a sex worker attending a play about prostitutes — but it could just as well have been a warning to the two actresses to expect tart advice from the audience.

The prostitutes who arrived at the Nico theatre to watch *Sweat on Somerset* — a reference to the red light stretch along Seapoint's main road — left their working clothes at home. Flowing dresses and platform sandals were the order of the day, not tight minis and stilettos.

Industrial size packets of condoms stacked in a cardboard box at the door were in demand as the prostitutes from a well-known rural sex trade spot along the N7 towards Malmesbury drifted into the darkened venue.

Rachel (not her real name) ordered everyone to sit closer, got on stage and cracked a joke or two before the lights went up on the gold curtain and plush bordelillo-red couch.

"There are 5 000 sex workers in greater Cape Town. Each sex worker has at least one client a day," is one of the opening statements, followed by a quick calculation that prostitutes turn a total of 1 825 000 tricks each year. "That means either each man goes to a sex worker 1.2 times a year or there is one tired man around town." Giggles from the audience set the tone for



Magic without tricks: Unbelievably, *Sweat on Somerset* has been sponsored by local escort agencies. PHOTOGRAPH: AK ADAMS

a performance that is a penetrating exploration of the sex industry in the Mother City where at one stage tourism officials proposed approval ratings for escort agencies.

Curiosity about the women who ply their trade from street corners, out of bus stop shelters and half-hidden by trees led to the play, which has been sponsored by local escort agen-

cies. Based on interviews with sex workers, the two actresses broach a side of the Mother City many want to ignore.

Preparation for the show included a visit to a strip joint. "It was a bit scary. You always have to confront your own sense of morality. But we are speaking for people without voices," said actress Roshina Ratnam.

The audience laughed loudly, recognising their clients in the portrayals of Mr Macho, Mr First Time and Mr Drunk. And giggles greeted comments on one of man's prime concerns — size: "Most have sappy little ones, but every now and again ... A merry, merry Christmas to you, too."

But the play also tackles the harsh economic realities of prostitutes, their dilemma in balancing romantic relationship and work and the double life many lead to hide from their families how they earn a livelihood.

"I liked it," said one prostitute. "Yeah, it's real life," her friend added.

There was time for a group photo. Then it was back to the bus in a boisterous mood, but not for a day under the sun on one of Cape Town's beaches.

"We haven't done business today yet," smiled one woman.

Sweat on Somerset is on at the Nico Theatre Complex until November 18. Booking at Computicket www.computicket.com

This year's FNB Vita Dance Umbrella has a record 200 fresh and passionate entries, among them works by new

Moving to the African soul

Thebe Mabanga

Vincent Sekwati Mantsoe is a man clearly peaking in his career as a dancer and choreographer. The 23-year-old associate artistic director of Moving into Dance exudes an air of quiet confidence that belies his stature as one of South Africa's leading dance practitioners.

He has come a long way from his Diepkloof upbringing where his mother, aunts and grandmother — whom he reveres like a sage — instilled in him immense respect for his culture, as well as an artistic inclination. "These women — all of whom were sangomas — taught me to respect our ancestors, something that was to become central to my work," he says, pointing out how singing and dancing as part of the rituals might have stimulated his creative urges.

His entry into dance was by chance. "I had grown up doing whatever township boys do [and that does not include dancing] and I reached a point where I had grown disillusioned and aimless. I then responded to a newspaper ad for Moving into Dance auditions and that is where my career began," he continues, falling short of saying that the rest is magic, or rather history.

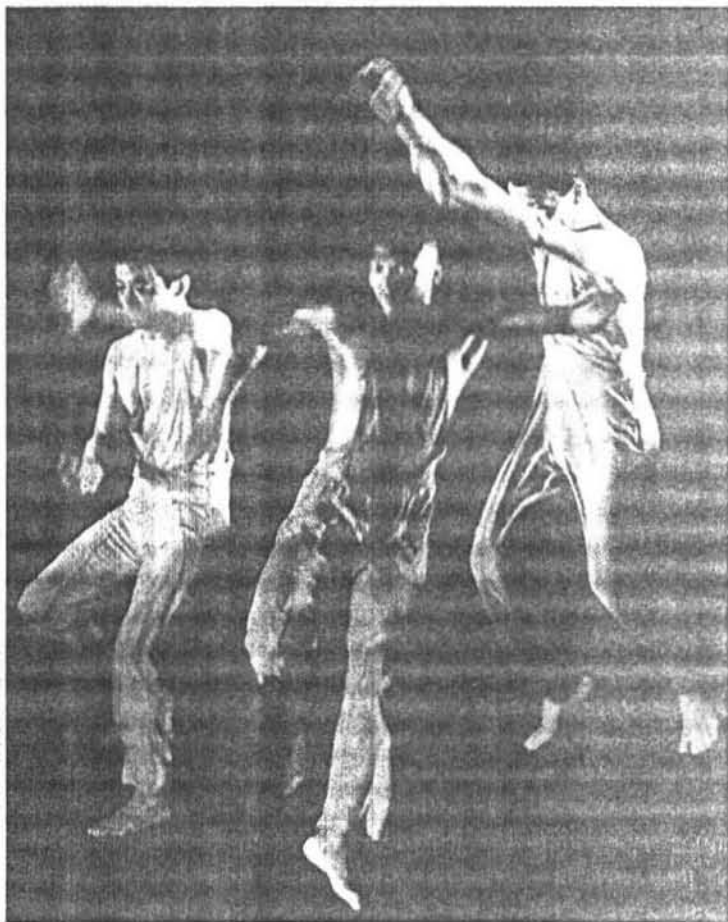
It is magic that was born of what he describes as a jagged "snapshot transition" from normal high school to studying dis-

ciplines like the history of dance, anthropology and movement. This was apart from pounding his body to perfect his technique.

It is a history that has seen him make his tour debut in Seville, Spain, just before the 1992 Barcelona Olympics and move on to spread his talent to places like Australia, France and his favourite country, Japan. "The work ethic and humility of those people moves me," he says of the land of the rising sun.

Along the way he has garnered numerous accolades including the 1995 Standard Bank Young Artist of the Year 1996 FNB Vita Male Choreographer of the Year as well as the fifth and sixth Rencontres Chorégraphiques Internationales (both in France). The impetus of this impressive streak was laid and is still centred at the Johannesburg Dance Umbrella.

It was there that, in his 1992 debut, he won pick of the fringe for his piece *African Soul*. It was also there that, in 1999, he scooped the best male choreography for a contemporary style (shared with Boyzie Cekwana) and best choreography for his piece, *Phokwane*. He has appeared in every edition in between and at this year's FNB Vita Dance



Jump for joy: Vincent Sekwati Mantsoe (centre) performs *Traduction Simultanée* with Takeshi Yazuki (left) and Michel Kelemenis. PHOTOGRAPH: TERUHIRA YUJIKI/LEO DE DROIT

Umbrella he collaborates with French choreographer Michel Kelemenis and Takeshi Yazuki of Japan to present *Traduction Simultanée*, a meeting of three cultures. All this has happened in a year-long period during which he brought the house down at the London Dance Umbrella, and flew back to collaborate with the Pretoria State Theatre and his company for their respective seasons. After the Dance Umbrella he will be touring with

Traduction until just before August.

Mantsoe believes that a dancer has to be "lucid" and his work is an example of this. Musically his material is at home with Ghana's Pan African Orchestra as it is with pianist Keith Jarrett. Whether he uses dancers to assimilate birds in flight for *Gula Matari*, or uses set and costume to create a scorched plane in *Hanano: Blessing of the Earth*, there is a contained yet bustling energy that

permeates his work.

He is clearly an artist whose vision has benefited from those around him. Among these he notes Moving into Dance founder and mentor Sylvia Glasser; his parents, his ancestors and God. Hang on to every leap.

Vincent Mantsoe's *Naka* will be performed at the Vits Theatre on March 1 and 3. *Borena* will be performed on March 13 and 19.

Dancing like a movie

Robert Colman

Gregory Vuyani Maqoma is one of the young choreographers commissioned to do a piece for this year's FNB Vita Dance Umbrella. I sat in on a rehearsal of his work, *Rhythm Blues*, at the Dance Factory. At first the dancers are self-conscious, pretending not to be, of the stranger in the rehearsal room. But they soon forget about me and get on with the job.

Maqoma takes Zakhele Nkosi through a solo. "Do you have a jersey to tie around your waist, something that wiggles?" he asks. The rehearsal room is soon filled with the energy of music and movement, and the concentration of Nkosi mirroring Maqoma's steps. A combination of sensuous fluidity breaks into leaps and staccato contractions. If the finished product is anything like the short piece I watched, it promises to be transfixing and exciting.

Talking to the talented 27-year-old afterwards, it is clear that Maqoma is a choreographer to watch out for — an eloquent young man brimming with ideas and optimistic about the future of South African dance and culture.

He is inspired by the broad spectrum of the arts. "I don't look at dance as separate from other art

forms. My choreography always involves music, theatre, fashion, video, visual art and poetry." His other source of ideas is the city. "Its vibrancy. And its 'squareness'. The buildings, the streets, the thinking and the rules are all square. The city is also our playground. There is a constant exchange of energy. It is the city that makes me optimistic about South African culture. We are so fortunate to have such a diversity of cultures to draw on. Cultures to fuse." This is integral to his style that he describes as a fusion of African and Western forms.

Rhythm Blues, featuring a live band and a DJ on stage, looks at the music and dance of the 1950s and 1960s. "I'm looking at how the past has influenced the present. We live in a society of sampling. Today music, dance and fashion are all sampled, but are still influenced by that generation."

Maqoma has come a long way since he started dancing in 1987, doing "street dance", a combination of township dance forms which were mostly American influenced. "We'd see stuff on TV, music videos, Michael Jackson, that sort of thing, and imitate it with a township flavour." His multi-skills training, including dance, choreography and teaching, at Moving into Dance led

to a one-year stint at the Brussels-based Performing Arts Research and Teaching Studios (PARTS).

Completing a circle, he has been invited to take *Rhythm Blues* to a festival at Parts after the Dance Umbrella. While studying in Brussels he choreographed *Rhythm 1, 2, 3*, which premiered in Amsterdam. "*Rhythm Blues* is the baby of *Rhythm 1, 2, 3*."

Despite attractive offers from out of the country we're not going to lose this talented young artist. He still wants to work here and to contribute to the development of dance in this country. He has established the Vuyani Dance Project to do just that: to develop and take dance into the community with the aim of attracting audiences in their fullest diversity.

He hopes that *Rhythm Blues* will take his audience on a journey. "Like watching a movie slowly unfold. I also want the audience to create their own story. And I aim to entertain, inform and move them. My work is like poetry. I want to fill my audience and want them to fill me. It's a two-way thing."

Rhythm Blues will be performed at the Dance Factory on March 14 and 16 by Gregory Vuyani Maqoma, Zakhele Nkosi, Portia Mashigo and Shanell Winlock.



Like poetry: Gregory Vuyani Maqoma's relationship to his audience is 'a two-way thing'. PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN HOGG

THE
WEEKLY MAIL

ARTS

film • theatre • music
books • food • travel

No boycott of Grahamstown festival

APPENDIX 11
for this year

THERE will be no boycott this year by democratic organisations of this year's Standard Bank National Festival of the Arts in Grahamstown.

Instead, recognising that significant moves have been made by the festival organisers in the direction of greater democratic participation, a policy of consultation will be pursued. However, the non-boycott will be conditional upon the "satisfactory outcome of negotiations between the newly elected Interim National Cultural Committee and the festival organisers".

This was decided at a national consultative meeting of more than 100 delegates representing cultural organisations from seven regions, at least one from each of the provinces.

The meeting also decided that a national cultural congress will be called in forthcoming months.

Though the interim committee — elect-

Weekly Mail Reporter

ed at a national consultative meeting in Hillbrow last weekend — committed itself to working together with existing progressive structures, notably the United Democratic Front's Cultural Desk, it is expected that the new organisation will largely supplant the desk after the congress.

During the session which dealt with the Grahamstown issue, attendance was swelled by the presence of representatives of the Festival Organising Committee who agreed to enter into negotiations with the interim committee on a number of issues related to the festival. These were:

- The festival's position on the cultural boycott
- Invitations by the festival to racially constituted organisations
- The festival's relationship with state

funded organisations

● The possibility of reconsidering the naming of the 1820 Foundation which backs the festival.

In recent years the nature of the festival has significantly changed as a result of community pressure and pressure from progressive organisations.

Support has been given to local cultural organisations and the festival committee has agreed to assist community groups in building a cultural centre.

Free tickets are to be provided for people from the townships around Grahamstown.

The consultative meeting acknowledged that while it was not a Mass Democratic Movement structure the festival committee was not an apartheid structure either.

However, it reaffirmed its commitment to transforming the festival into a people's festival.

Culture takes up the cudgel — again —

Should culture be the 'instrument of the struggle' or should it be an independent, critical voice about our country? IVOR POWELL reports on the ongoing debate

If you, like many other people in this country, thought that winds of change were blowing on the "battlefronts of culture", think again.

"First and foremost culture is an instrument of struggle.

"Culture is the soul of the people and therefore it is a very important, a very essential instrument of the struggle. It's a very important and essential aspect of the lives of the people, both socially and politically. Without the necessary means to organise ourselves culturally we can find ourselves unable to achieve the goals we have set for ourselves."

The speaker is Naledi Tsiki, Pretoria activist and recent Eolwen Island inmate. The occasion is last weekend's National Cultural Congress in Hillbrow, where representatives from seven regions in four provinces thrashed out the establishment of a national authority responsible for South African progressive culture.

Tsiki was standing in as the African National Congress' keynote speaker for Albie Sachs who, as Tsiki perhaps unwittingly remarked, "a tsiki could not make it".

Sachs is a well-known critic of the cruder versions of the "culture as a weapon of the struggle" argument. But in his absence, at least during that part of the proceedings where press presence was tolerated, this was the interpretation which unambiguously held sway. Naledi spelt it out.

"Through culture we are in a position to reach a much wider spectrum of people than can be done through a political organisation, whether it is the Mass Democratic Movement, the ANC or any other political organisation — because culture has a human appeal. The people love to hear music, they love to hear the peoples' voice ... these are the things that are tactical. Even when Nelson Mandela didn't reach people, you can bring your cultural group. It can reach those people and through it you can get the message across. That is why cultural workers have such an important and such a special role."

That message was to be made equally clear in the opening minutes of Tsiki's address: "As you are well aware culture is an instrument of struggle ... (It is used) to motivate people to struggle, to be able to get people to realise themselves, to gain their own self-confidence, to be certain of the correctness of their objectives."

"Culture is a way of enlarging or magnifying their (the people's) perceptions in relation to their own objectives. It is a way of bringing to the realisation of the people as a whole the importance of their own struggle. In other words through culture we are able to pay special attention to specific aspects of our struggle and to magnify them. It's a kind of a magnifying glass. And in the process to show the beauty of what we are doing, in the process to instill confidence in ourselves as to the correctness of the path we are treading."

If this has a disturbingly Orwellian ring, it rises to a deafening clang during the 10 minutes allocated for discussion. A representative from the Border region stood up to ask the highly pertinent question: what is our role when we find that the culture the people really want to consume is the bubblegum culture such as that of Brenda Fassie?

Tsiki's response was decisive. "If we feel that there is any aspect of our culture that demeans our people, that is not at the level where it should be, our task as politically conscious cultural workers ... and I believe as cultural workers we are social leaders ... is to

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Michael McCabe, as Sorin, adds a touch of comic subtlety to Chekov's *The Seagull*

Chekov as comedy. It succeeds

THEATRE: *The Seagull*
VENUE: Adcock-Ingram, Windybrow

The Seagull is a difficult play: to direct, to act and, one suspects, often to watch. There are no histrionics, no easily recognisable jokes, no moments of gut-wrenching drama. It is a very ordinary tale of a small, privileged community out of touch with its environment; out of step with history and pretty much out of reach of redemption.

It focuses, in impressive detail, on the banalities of life and love; unfulfilled ambition and unrequited passion. Chekov does this by creating no less than four love-triangles in his little group, the characters slipping in and out of them with various degrees of hurt, bewilderment and resignation.

None are resolved in any dramatic conclusion; none are terminated by any great tragedy (except by one suicide, in the final seconds, that Chekov determinedly keeps off-stage); most just meander on with the characters unable to alter their course and confined to an almost passive participation.

In Chekov's world, there are no blinding revelations. Lessons are not learned and life simply takes its course; in most cases that course being pretty unexceptional.

Pact's is a charming and magnetic production that draws the audience right into the human situation Chekov portrays. Director, designer and cast have done well in capturing just the right tone of country-house ennui and intellectual apathy.

Lindy Robert's set is important, with its slightly faded backdrop and airy spaciousness that allows a listlessness essential to some of the characters. Ise von Hemert's direction provides an evenness in performance with some spectacular results.

One of these is Michael McCabe's, who, playing well within himself, brings to a rather pathetic role a touch of comic subtlety that is a crucial component of the evening's success. Sandra Prinsloo strains for pathos rather than hysteria, while James Borthwick, always a restrained and unselfish performer, centres the production with his air of common sense and common humanity.

There are more fine performances in the same vein. Dale Cutts as the crabby old bailiff is good, illustrating the banality of domestic tyranny. And so is Embeth Davidtz, reducing tragedy to foolishness. Graham Hopkins is assured in showing that a successful and famous novelist suffers from common-place weaknesses and fallibilities.

It is difficult to pinpoint why this production is such an enjoyable one but it is well worth a visit.

John Campbell

Demea kicks off — in a boxing gym in Hillbrow

Guy Butler wrote *Demea* in 1960. It is to be performed — for the first time — at the Grahamstown festival in 1990. CELIA WREN visited a kickboxing gym to watch the rehearsals

AFTER 30 years, Guy Butler's play *Demea* is finally in rehearsal.

Under the scrupulous supervision of director Dieter Reible, 18 actors, including Nomsa Xaba, Graham Hopkins and Peter Se-Puma, are readying the tragedy of love, betrayal and prejudice for the Grahamstown main theatre festival.

Butler, the well-known playwright and poet, English professor at Rhodes University since 1952, wrote this adaptation of Euripides' *Medea* in 1960. But, calling as it did for a multi-racial cast, the play was for years unproducible. Pact has finally taken it on, and packed the cast off to rehearse in a spacious Hillbrow kickboxing gym.

Tragedy may not be a stranger to kickboxing gyms, but this tragedy has a finer pedigree than most. Euripides' *Medea* was an enchantress who helped the adventurer Jason capture the magical golden fleece. Having married Medea, Jason later deserted her, and in revenge she murdered both him and their young sons.

In Butler's version, which is set during a trek in the late 1820s, the *Medea* character is a Thembu princess named Demea whose white husband leaves her to join a racially pure group of trekkers. In his foreword to the script, Butler explains that while none of the 19th century trekking parties were "run along Verwoerdian lines", he invented such a group for the purpose of historical allegory.

Demea symbolises the plight of the black and "coloured" people during the early 1950s when English-speaking whites, as Butler sees it, abandoned them to the vicissitudes of apartheid.

The meaning of Butler's fable was abundantly clear on a recent Friday morning, in the Summit Club's kickboxing gym. The Summit Club is situated on Claim Street; in a freize on its outer walls an archer points his bow in the direction of Yeoville. Inside, the elevators are painted pink and the stairways hum with mysterious comings and goings. The kickboxing gym occupies the building's second floor.

Wooden floorboard takes up most of the space, but a carpeted nook in the corner features a small lounge and bar where the walls glow with the outlines of huge neon popcicles. A chalkboard next to the door of the gym instructs all would-be kickboxers with the schedule for their practices: "10 minutes skipping," it announces. "50 press-ups ..." and so on, right down to a last joyful bout of free-fighting.

The cast of *Demea*, for its part, was exerting itself in thought and voice, rather than brute muscle. As the room throbbled with a beat from the discotheque on the floor below, the actors sat in a circle and chanted lines from a chorus over and over again.

"We want, we will fight for a land," they intoned, "where thickness of lips and colour of skin are not the same as original sin." Reible knelt on the floor in a multicoloured sweater, peering at the actors over the rims of his spectacles. "Once again from the beginning," he suggested, "don't lose energy. If you have

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World Cup, biggest coup of SABC's life

CLIFF SAUNDERS popped up in Hungary this week, a bronze statue of Karl Marx roiled dejectedly to a spot just behind his left ear. Cliff was having the time of his life. He probably hadn't had this much fun since the days when he used to go around courageously exposing American racism.

On the subject of Eastern Europe, his powers of irony have scaled new peaks. A couple of caged bears being driven through the streets of Budapest to advertise a circus reminded Cliff of the fate of the once-ferocious Russian Bear. And he thought he detected a somewhat brooding expression on Karl Marx's chiselled features as the statue pondered the cruel fate that on this, the day of his anniversary, the university students over whom he had once loomed large were all off gelling their hair and watching Duran Duran videos.

Cliff informed us that while the Hungarian nation had not yet decided whether to melt down the many statues of Marx and Engels, it was implied that the new Hungarian entrepreneurs would relish the chance to turn the metallic scholars into "I Love New York" buttons. Isn't freedom grand?

Cliff Saunders was not the only fit-to-burst happy person on Tuesday night's news.

Soccer's answer to the three good fairies, Abdul Bhamjee, Barry Lambert and, in an honorary capacity, SABC chief Hein Jordaan, were interviewed about the coup of South African television's lifetime: live broadcast rights to the World Cup. What does it matter how much it cost? Hell, who's counting when the international "goodwill" towards the pariah state secured by the deal is the only really important thing?

It remains only to be seen how much "goodwill" South Africans who do not care much for football are prepared to extend to the SABC during the next month.

Of the 52 matches to be played in Italy, 42 will be screened — that's two games a day, plus repeats of the previous day's matches every morning. Altogether, that's four soccer matches a day. I see trouble a-brewing in many otherwise happy homes.

Speaking of Abdul Bhamjee, has anyone ever noticed a more than passing resemblance to that other good sport, Yasser Arafat? For instance, they both have a sartorial way about them — Abdul in his shiny red-on-red striped suit and personalised tie-pin, Yasser

in his headscarf shaped like a map of old Palestine, bulging holster on his hip.

The BBC documentary *Arafat: Behind the Myth*, broadcast by M-Net this week, showed the leader of the Palestine Liberation Organisation to be a bundle of contradictions. Bald as a baseball without his veil, Arafat, like most people who build up a substantial something from nothing, has a flair for theatrics.

When he walked into the United Nations to deliver his historic address in 1973, he reluctantly agreed to leave his gun at the door, the weapon that has become part of his personal dress code being an ever-ready symbol of the armed struggle in which he has been engaged for the last 25 years. Arafat made dark glasses a personal trademark long before Bob Dylan thought of it.

His political career can be charted by *Time* magazine covers: freedom fighter or terrorist? Foul-hearted beast or angel of mercy? Revolutionary or statesman? As Nelson Mandela will agree, the labels change with the times.

But there can be little doubt that Yasser Arafat has been the single most important, most constant activist in the movement to resist Israeli attempts to make the Palestinian Arabs vanish like rabbits into top hats.

Arafat himself is practised in the art of making unpleasant memories go away. When questioned about the extent of his involvement in the Munich Olympics massacre — had he or hadn't he silently condoned the actions of the Black September group? — he responded like the amateur magician whose chicken egg trick has just been bust by a five year old.

"Be careful with your investigation," he warned the British journalist. "Remember you are talking to the president of the state of Palestine." He refused to answer any more questions that day.

At his breakfast of a bowl of cornflakes doused in hot tea the next morning, however, he was all smiles again. As the bachelor-boy of Middle-Eastern politics surveyed his "family" of hangers-on, he offered a somewhat surprising remark: "The Jews," he said, "are our cousins."

This gave fresh impetus to the popular notion that even the best families will have their little spats.



Television
Charlotte Bauer



Stimela guitarist Ray Phiri

ARTS

In search of new sounds, the West turns to Africa

By RICK GLANVILLE

WHY should The Blow Monkeys use a little-known singer from Algeria called Cheb Khaled on their new record? Why should Bruce Springsteen send for box-loads of records from Zimbabwe and South Africa? And why do so many people turn up each year to festivals organised by Womad (World of Music, Arts and Dance) in which most of the performers are from Africa, Asia and the Caribbean?

Because African music is now popular in Britain. It has taken hundreds of years for the African sound to be properly heard — though there was an African trumpeter in King Henry VIII's army band in the 16th century.

Top African musicians such as Salif Keita from Mali, and the Senegalese singer Youssou N'Dour visit Britain regularly, their records are released by the same record companies as U2 and Soul II Soul. They don't sell quite as many but receive stunning reviews from the music press.

Some say African music has burst onto the world music scene because Western rock has run out of ideas, and rock fans and performers are looking for new sounds and inspiration — that Bruce Springsteen and The Blow Monkeys got interested because their popularity is on the wane.

They used to say the same thing about Talking Heads singer David Byrne, who used several of the best-known African musicians on the 1988 album *Naked*, and Paul Simon who is sometimes credited with creating an upsurge of world interest in South African music by recording 1985's *Graceland* there with local music heroes like the choir Ladysmith Black Mambazo and arranger/guitarist Ray Phiri.

Despite its controversial breaching of the United Nations cultural boycott preventing Western musicians from working in South Africa, *Graceland* was a bestseller, but it would not have happened without the crucial roles of the South African musicians. This shows that African music is popular in its own right, whether or not rock has become stagnant.

Most of the countries in Africa were given independence from their European colonisers (Britain, France, Belgium, Portugal) in the 1960s and 1970s, and the new black-led governments were keen to revive the traditional African culture that had been suppressed under their occupiers.

Immediate priority was given to promoting the arts — music, dance and literature — and musicians were seen as important cultural ambassadors. In some countries, particularly the ancient nations of Mali and Guinea, a system had existed for centuries which divided some families into royalty and others into musicians who would play for them and sing the praises of the rich man they served.

Eyuphuro are from Mozambique and reflect their country's recent troubled past. South African-backed forces have been waging war on the government since independence in 1974. Eyuphuro's music is hauntingly sophisticated, but like many other African acts the emphasis is as much on pleasure as politics. — The Guardian, London

Culture takes up the cudgel. Again

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look at means and methods of improving that level which is low and bring it up."

He went on to stress that "criticism is allowed". But while the message need not, Tsiki said, be political, it needs to be "one that the people in the country are satisfied with".

However, "if we feel it lowers the standard we can devise means and methods of improving that. The people who must set the pace are cultural workers not speaking from a position of ignorance."

"We must always increase our skills in culture, increase our knowledge in culture to be able to determine what is culturally acceptable, what is improvement, what is regression."

The example of Brenda Fassie is a peculiarly inept one in context. She sells something like 100 000 copies of every record she releases. She routinely draws crowds larger than those at even the most significant political rallies.

To invoke "the people" as arbiters of retrogressiveness in relation to a performer like Fassie is unfortunate.

The structures may be national or proto-national and not merely Transvaal-based these days.

Tsiki may not be all that representative of current thinking within the community of cultural commissars. One question addressed from the floor was on a point of clarification: "Was the comrade in fact personally active in the field of culture?"

The answer was no.

To be fair, there were also other messages, notably — in line with current ANC policy — that differences should be put aside between anti-apartheid cultural workers from different

political constituencies and common cultural goals be forged.

It was also acknowledged that forms of culture like dance were not the property of a specific political grouping and were the property of the nation as a whole. These, while being identifiably South African, would not be required to further the struggle as such.

In the end though, there was the same old arrogance: culture belongs to the commissars, culture is the baby sister of politics to be guided and chastised, or indulged and petted at the whim of its social elders. Certainly there was never any sense that the independent, critical voice of culture could be one from which we could learn something about either our country or our humanity.

One was left with the same old questions about the cultural desk and its satellite structures — seriously and not merely rhetorically. Which people? What culture?

Playwright visits US

PRIZE-WINNING playwright Maïshe Maponya left for the United States this week on a US Information Service special visitors' grant.

Maponya, who is also vice-chairman of the Performing Arts Workers Equity (Pawe) and a lecturer at the Wits School of Dramatic Art, will be visiting universities and community theatre projects.

Pawe has asked him to establish links with performing arts groups and equities in the US and Britain.

Demea to kick off after 30 years

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three lines, on the second one don't step down, step up." A musician plucked at a traditional instrument, and the chorus began again.

When the chants overlapped each other to a ghostly perfection, the cast and Reible moved on to the next scene. At this point in the play, a white-skinned couple is attempting to give away their dark-complexioned baby in whom their "coloured" ancestry has betrayed itself. Reible took off his sweater to serve as the baby, and the actors talked their way through the scene, discussing the movement and psychology of their characters as they went.

Watching this spectacle from the corner as they awaited their entrance were the two small boys playing Demea's sons. When asked how many plays they had been in, the boys were unsure; they had been in so many, they implied, that they had rather lost track. Then one came and they ran across the stage shouting that they had killed a wild lynx.

Reible watched and mused them through the play. After the Grahamstown 1992 Festival will return for a run at the M... ..

CLASSICAL MUSIC

A magnificent mass

MOZART — *Mass in C Minor* (L'Oiseau-Lyre)
CHRISTOPHER HOGWOOD and the Academy of Ancient Music have given us a splendid recording of Mozart's greatest setting of the Mass, in a new edition by Richard Maunder.

We have become accustomed to excellence in the Academy's playing, and on this disc it is of a particularly high standard. The style is dry but muscular, unmistakably "authentic", but energetic and powerful enough to satisfy listeners who prefer a lush sound.

The crispness of attack and phrasing in both orchestra and choir (Winchester Cathedral Choir and Winchester College Quiristers) imparts a feeling of lift and forward movement, revealing the life inherent in the score. The choir is first-rate, the trebles especially impressive.

The recording is notable too for a magnificent performance from Arleen Auger, displaying not only an extraordinary vocal dexterity, apparent particularly in the *Incarnatus* and the Finnish leaps of an octave and a half in the *Domine*, but also a consistency of timbre remarkable for one singing a part that ranges from a top C to a low A.

Her pairing with Lynne Dawson, the other soprano soloist, is a stroke of genius; so good are they that the male soloists, John Mark Ainsley and David Thomas, are hopelessly upstaged.



DisConnection
DAVID SCOURFIELD

Thomas, who sings only in the *Benedictus*, is not at his best.

SCHUBERT — *Winterreise* (EMI)
SCHUBERT'S song-cycle has not wanted for interpreters on disc. The Fischer-Dieskau/Gerald Moore rendition of nearly 20 years ago won almost definitive status, unmatched until the 1985 recording — in a live performance — of Peter Schreier and Sviatoslav Richter.

Now EMI has brought us a baritone from a younger generation, Olaf Bar (see spelling),

with Geoffrey Parsons, still one of the finest of accompanists, at the piano. The distinctive qualities of Bar's voice engage excitingly with the varying intensity of the music. Its slightly breathy, almost muted character in the more subdued passages has a mysterious touch, dark and misty, as if conveying the resigned pain and loneliness of the singer-wanderer; the *fortissimi*, on the other hand, are clear and rich, often suggestive of anguish and frustration.

This melancholy, pessimistic work, in which death and madness are never far away, calls for deep psychological insight from the performers. From the ruptured love-affair of *Gute Nacht* to the incipient insanity of *Die Nebensonnen* Bar never loses his grip on the drama of the songs, fragments of a breakdown; and Parsons displays his usual sure touch.

A fine addition to any collection.

Weekend Mail

Books: A new book examines a South Africa gripped by violence from all sides **Page 27**

Radio: A Swiss programme gives a doctor's opinion of 'medically correct' torture **Page 23**

Beauty pageants: Sitting on the judging panel of Miss Hillbrow and Mr Scants **Page 28**

Arts councils face uncertain future

RAEFORD DANIEL looks at the future of the Performing Arts Councils and examines a revolutionary formula for making them a more viable entity in the new South Africa.

THE future of the performing arts councils in the new South Africa is in the balance. Weathering not only the vicissitudes of the economic climate, they face the threat of reduced subsidy and have been condemned to destruction (or at best transformation) by the culture wing of the African National Congress.

Whether or not ANC Department of Arts and Culture head Barbara Masekela's charge at this year's Grahamstown Festival of their being "evil and racist" has any foundation in fact must be the subject of an ongoing debate.

Of more immediate concern is their viability, financial as well as artistic, as vehicles for the presentation of material that could further the interests of the arts in general and theatre in particular in the new dispensation in South Africa.

The issue at stake is the limited seasons the prevailing system affords plays with the potential of long runs and the attendant losses in income both for the council concerned and the people — actors, director, technical staff et al — involved in the production.

The felony is compounded when the work at issue is a new one by a local author. If the work is commissioned (a rare practice in South African theatre) a fixed sum may be entailed. More frequently the playwright's income is derived from royalties — something for which there is little scope when the work is accorded a prescribed run.

The anomaly arises because the councils, the state-subsidised regional successors to what was once the National Theatre Organisation, are bound to a traditional policy of presenting a large variety of plays which have to be accommodated at the venues available in the time allocated.

But the plays presented by NTO reached a wide audience as each production toured the country (if not, unfortunately, visiting the black townships and rural communities). Today the audience potential is circumscribed. Pact, for instance, operates essentially in Johannesburg, Pretoria and Roodepoort. Tours, except for the Grotovskiy-oriented schools programmes, are rare.

But, while assertively not a commercial management, Pact has, from time to time, ventured into the field by presenting the latest Broadway and West End successes. An example was Bobby Heaney's highly acclaimed production of *Glengarry Glen Ross*, a play which, had it been presented by, say, Pieter Toerien, may have run for months.

It did not. Its season, true, was extended by a few days. A proposed season in Cape Town did not materialise. Capab mounted its own version.

More recently a masterly and highly enjoyable production by Ilse van Hemert of Chekhov's *The Seagull*, hailed by the critics as near definitive, had to close after its allocated span — despite the fact that there was an insistent demand for seats — because the *Animal Farm* company had to move in.

The answer would appear to be for the Performing Arts Council to abandon its traditional format and start operating like any other commercial management and give productions the chance to reach their full potential.

In the words of Des Lindberg, chairman of the South African Association of Theatre Managements, "A galloping horse must be allowed room to gallop".

Lindberg said: "Like it or not, we are entering into the era of a new South Africa. We have got to be vibrant, have got to avoid the iniquitous

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King of the castle ... Ronnie Oelofson, owner of The Dungeon nightclub, South Africa's longest running gay nightclub, which is housed in the historic Three Castles building. See Page 29 for an account of the club's history and background

Photo: KEVIN CARTER

UN meeting on cultural boycott

By Paul Alexander

A GROUP of South African cultural activists are meeting senior officials of the United Nations Special Committee Against Apartheid in New York this week to plan for a major international symposium on the cultural and academic boycott.

Attending the New York meeting are members of the special committee, Nigerian ambassador Gambia Ibrahim, who chairs the Centre Against Apartheid, and US and UK observers.

The South African delegation includes Barbara Masekela and Pallo Jordan (African National Congress), Rashid Lahim (South African Musicians' Alliance), Gora Ibrahim (Pan Africanist Congress), Junaid Ahmed (Congress of South African Writers), Mike Morris (Union of Democratic University Staff Associations) and cultural activists Matsemela Manaka and Dall Tambo. Masekela and Lanie left the country on Tuesday evening for the day-long meeting.

"The aim of the meeting is to give South Africans an opportunity to discuss and consult on current thoughts of the policy of cultural and academic boycott within the country," said Sotiris Mousouris, head of the UN Centre Against Apartheid, speaking from his New York office.

The proposed symposium — planned for Los Angeles in February — would be a follow-up to the Culture Against Apartheid gathering in Athens two years ago, where delegates endorsed the concept of "exceptions" to the cultural boycott — a selective boycott in place of a blanket ban.

Coinciding with the New York meeting — at United Nations headquarters — will be the historic Durban Consultative Cultural Conference beginning tomorrow, from which will be born a national cultural federation.

Included in this federation's programme of action would be the possible lifting of the "selective" cultural and academic boycott.

Young actors work for Aids education

On Sunday, four youth groups will perform Aids plays at the Roosevelt Park Recreation Centre, as part of World Aids Day. **MARK GEVISSER** attends a rehearsal of one of the groups at the Alexandra Community Health Centre

YOUR eyes glitter like a night star, the township gadabout says to the pretty young girl as she waits at the taxi-rank. I'm Shine, he introduces himself, I'm a Golden Boy. I talk of town. Let me take you to a nice, exclusive place where we can be alone.

Shine, she replies, you act like a fly by jumping from one girl to another. I like myself, but you obviously don't like yourself. You must learn to protect yourself from the killer disease called Aids.

THEY play with such sincerity, these two young Alexandra actors, that, with the help of the music (supplied with a heavy hand of keyboard melancholia by Hamlet and Stanley in the corner) the tiny pre-fab waiting-room of the Alex Community Health Centre becomes the locus for a passion play, a moral fable, a sex-education lesson both boisterous and stern.

In the breaks of music one can hear the township cows lowing on the swathe of grass outside and the din of a "Christ Saves" procession parading through the nearby squatter camp.

The players enter bit by bit, rushing over from work on this weekday afternoon. Outside, they are schoolkids earning holiday money at Dion or Checkers, but as they pass beneath the posters proclaiming "Safer rather than sorry — you can prevent Aids" and "Avoid unwanted pregnancy" they transform, swaggering and determined, into actors and Aids educators.

"Not everyone reads the papers or watches TV," explains Leah Vilankulu, head nurse at the health centre and mother of the project. "And if they see posters, it's considered to be propaganda from the outside. But if you have a play, the people themselves become involved, the participants tell their friends, and everyone starts to ask questions. It becomes a project — a matter of pride — for the whole community."

So she enlisted local scribe Izzy Moloto to write a script, and went door to door to families she knows with kids who love acting but have no outlet.

Moloto, who has written and directed several informal township projects but who knew nothing about Aids, says, "I really had to educate myself on the issue. I stayed up late into the night reading books. And I realised that theatre is the perfect vehicle for this kind of education. When people see a poster, they just look at it. But when they see someone else playing a role, they identify with it."

Eighteen-year-old Pheus Sekhalelo, who plays Shine, says he was anxious at first for precisely that reason. "My friends told me not to do it, because I would be seen to be a wild womaniser, and then as someone with Aids." It was hard for him at first, he admits, but with a casual shrug he betrays his aspirations: "The challenge of a true actor is take on any part and make it his own."

Like the playwright, the leading man knew nothing about Aids when he first joined the project. Of course, Vilankulu explains, the young

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Schoolkids' theatre will tackle Aids issues

tors — there are 12 of them between the ages 16 and 25 — needed much education. At first they laughed at condoms and saw the disease as government plot. "So we had to begin by aching them. But now we've got 12 trained aids educators. And they will train others, who will train others, and we can begin to fight this epidemic properly — from the inside."

When Vilankulu presented her idea to The Aids Centre at the South African Institute of Medical Research, so taken with it were they that they started similar projects with three other groups — in Sharpeville, at STEP at Wits, and with the Concerned Youth of Soweto.

Five plays will be presented on Sunday at a Youth Aids Theatre Festival, as part of this week's World Aids Day. "But it's just a beginning," says Nikolaus Knigge of The Aids Centre. "Only a few hundred schoolchildren will see the plays on Sunday. After that, we're hoping that they will perform at schools and community centres all over the townships."

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Knigge and Aubrey Maudsorp of the Community Health Centre, a former professional actor, attend the rehearsals as advisors.

In a rather Brechtian manner, Izzy Moloto's play — called *Play Safe* — opens with each actor walking on stage with a sign emblazoned by a slogan that is read by its carrier: "Aids is a killer"; "Don't change partners"; "Use condoms"; "I love myself and I'll prevent Aids".

Then, in the space of 20 hyper-emotional minutes, a narrative unfolds around Shine that touches almost every base: sexual morality, peer group pressure, African tradition, homosexuality, illness and death, all fused together with a blunt and full-frontal didacticism.

Each of the 15-odd short, sharp scenes has a message. When Shine finds out he is HIV-seropositive, for example, his mother and girl-

friend take him to a sangoma, who attempts to draw "impure" blood from the sick young man with a razor-blade.

"Are you going to use that dirty razor-blade?" shouts the girlfriend. "You better sterilise it first!" When the sangoma refuses, the three leave.

"I think the girl was right," the abandoned sangoma then confides in his audience. "I must sterilise the razor in future. I just lost a patient because of my stubbornness."

The message runs deeper than Aids: we have control over our lives, and we must exercise it. If your boyfriend won't wear a condom, don't sleep with him. If the sangoma won't clean his blade, leave. Act.

● The 1990 Youth Aids Theatre Festival takes place this Sunday, from 9.30 am to 4.00 pm, at the Roosevelt Park Recreation Centre, c/o Anton van Wouw and Preller Drives, Roosevelt Park. Admission is free. Call 725-65512 for more information.

Arts councils under threat

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system of bureaucracy and overspending that has caused the closing of the Johannesburg Civic Theatre for six years.

Peter Terry, assistant artistic director of Pact, told me that the councils were "very aware of the problem".

"It must be remembered," he said, "that we are not involved primarily in commercial theatre. We have to think as much about artistic potential."

"What is needed, I suppose, is more flexibility in our planning. But the potential runs of plays presented are hard to predict. It must also be remembered that we have to keep seven venues alive in Pretoria and Johannesburg and provide employment for 25 actors and five directors."

"Our planning has to be done well in advance and is, perhaps, more rigid than we would like it to be."

"Market Theatre plays, I understand, run for seven to eight weeks before they reach breakeven point."

"A possible answer may be to introduce a repertory system, doing, say, five or six plays in an extended season. If any of these plays fail, the time allotted could be tacked on to the running time of the more successful ones."

NICCC paper suggests boycott of arts councils

By Paul Alexander

THE National Interim Cultural Co-ordinating Conference has called on all progressive organisations, musicians and artists to refrain from working with the performing arts councils until they are "fully democratised and representative of all interests and sections of the population".

A firm decision on the future relationship between the state-funded and controlled performing arts councils and cultural organisations is expected to come out from this weekend's Consultative Cultural Conference in Durban.

NICCC chairman Dennis Nkosi this week told *The Weekly Mail* that such state and semi-state institutions must be avoided until the process of engagement is fully underway.

He went on to say "at the moment the internal cultural and academic boycott has not been lifted" even though there is some form of negotiation at a regional level in Natal and the Cape. The most successful of these negotiations have been between the NICCC and the Natal Performing Arts Council.

Nkosi's paper — titled *New Tactics for New Times* — is to be presented for discussion at the consultative conference. It calls for the need to recognise the new South African era of "reconstruction and reconciliation" in light of the release of political prisoners and imminent return of exiles.

In Nkosi's view, a positive aspect of the Napac/NICCC meetings has been the opening of a community outreach office. There have also been discussions between the NICCC and the 1820 Foundation on possible banning of "racist institutions" from performing at the Grahamstown Arts Festival.

ROCK/POP

Ferguson makes the spine tingle

JENNIFER FERGUSON — *Untimely* (Shifty)

THIS, Jennifer Ferguson's second album, is a superb piece of work. Songs like *All Things, Sweet Freedom* and *Where You Gonna Be Tomorrow?* are beautiful and spine-tingling; on *Eye for Africa* and *Finger Speaks in White River*, however, the tingle modulates to a chill.

Somehow her songs combine a sense of fragility and a deep power. They have an authenticity, an acknowledgement of pain. Besides anger and compassion, there is an ironic humour. *Untimely* is moving and beautifully crafted: that rolling Dollarish piano, the sliding, soaring voice with its filigree of vibrato.

Ferguson is one of our most important and exciting songwriters, and *Untimely* is a magnificent testament to her talent.



MANGO GROOVE — *Homelink* (Tusk)

ANOTHER second album. Mango Groove bounces along energetically and quite pleasantly on theirs — I don't like the slow songs much, though, *Marabi Party* and *Shoo-Boop!* are great dance numbers, but on *Island Boy* and *Trouble Tonight* the swinging tunes and well-organised brass seem overwhelmed by a certain plastic quality — of which Claire Johnston's voice is an element. And why does the penny whistle sound so organically apt on some songs and like such a gimmick on others?



Some local records that have come before me recently — a brief summation. Celtic Rumours' *Greed* (RPM) is, I'm afraid, agony to my ears. They sound like Spandau Ballet on a particularly bad day. Wozani's *Flaming in the Moonlight* (RPM) is township pop no better than the average. *The Siney Sessions 3*, with songs by a gaggle of groups, is disappointing, and Little Sister's *Ready and Willing* (Tusk) is pure mediocrity.

And with the ghost of Christmas in the immediate future, the *Very Best of* albums are beginning to line up. One good one is *Stepping Out: The Very Best of Joe Jackson* (proof that jazz and ska can mix). For those that like Elton John (I don't), there is a double LP of all his hits — identical, I'm told, but for the fourth side, to his last *Best of* compilation.

The Beach Boys are represented by *Summer Dreams*, a 32-song collection that reproduces the best numbers of their short heyday (and the few successes of their decline).

It's amazing how well the Beach Boys' music has lasted — even the most ludicrously chirpy peacocks to surfing and deuce coups (as they called them) are superbly wrought songs.

Things like *Don't Worry Baby*, *Good Vibrations* and *God Only Knows* are certain classics. And here you'll find too such unusual numbers as *Wild Honey* and *In My Room*, an eerie song in which the perfect harmonies evoke numb despair instead of mindless fun-seeking, prefiguring Brian Wilson's sad breakdown and withdrawal.

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Nelson Mass for Chamber Choir

JOSEF HAYDN'S Nelson Mass will be performed by the Johannesburg Chamber Choir tomorrow night at the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Keyes Avenue, Rosebank.

They will be joined by members of the National Orchestra, forming a chamber orchestra under the leadership of Denise Sutton.

The soloists are Margie Nel, Gillian Zierwogel, Neels Boonzaier and Eric Visser.

The performance starts at 8pm.

**INTERVIEW WITH CHARLOTTE BAUER, OBSERVATORY, JOHANNESBURG,
1.11.2000**

**Previously arts editor in the *Weekly Mail*
Presently consultant editor for the *Sunday Times***

CHARLOTTE BAUER (CB): My background is purely in journalism. I didn't do an arts related degree or anything like that. I became a reporter and a feature writer on the *Rand Daily Mail*, which was a newspaper that closed down, which is when we started the *Weekly Mail* in 1985. At the time I was still very young, I was 23 or something, so it wasn't like I had carved out a niche in arts journalism.

When [the *Weekly Mail*] started it was less a question of what your special skill was, but more a question of well, "okey, we got five people. Somebody got to do politics, somebody got to do arts" and I said, "I'll do arts". So that is how my formal involvement [started]. I would never call myself an art critic. I am not, and I don't have that kind of background, but what I was good at and what I did do - I could put the right people together. So that was my duty to go out and identify who the good critics were. And they did not come from formal critical background either. We had lawyers - one of our best critics was a theology doctoral student. They came from all over the place, all sorts of backgrounds, but they weren't mainstream and they became the new sort of voices of the predominately white left-wing.

And my present job - I don't have a present job. I quit my job. I was the editorial page editor at the *Sunday Times* until two months ago, three months ago, and then I quit that for various personal reasons and now I'm just working for the *Sunday Times* as a consultant editor two days a week.

TERESA GROGAN (TG): How long were you in the *Mail&Guardian*?

CB: From 85 to 95, nine, ten years.

TG: And then in the *Sunday Times*?

CB: Then the *Sunday Times* for five or six years.

TG: Could you talk a bit about the first time in the *Mail&Guardian* as an arts editor? Did you have an agenda?

CB: I suppose we did have an agenda, which in retrospect seems fairly kind of smug righteous one. For me it was twofold, it was one - obviously arts and culture then were becoming very politicised. We wanted to emphasise the politics of every aspect of society. I suppose one agenda [was] to get around to highlighting and giving exposure to people making cultur[al] and artistic interventions [that] were about the counterculture at the time and who weren't getting a lot of exposure and publicity in mainstream publications at the time. And the other one was simply in terms of more of aesthetic style thing, then as now unfortunately the standards of actual arts and cultural writing are very low, not at least on the *Sunday Times*. I was actually hired by the *Sunday Times* as an arts editor because they thought they wanted what I had done in the *Weekly Mail*, but after a year they decided they didn't want that at all,

they wanted Barry Ronge's film reviews. I just reinvented myself within the *Sunday Times* context because I just said that "as much as you are not happy with the way I try to cover arts at the *Sunday Times* and if it doesn't fit you image and readership, I'm not interested in disguising the dissembling arts as somebody's... some actress favourite bloody banana muffin recipe".

That was the short end of my career as the *Sunday Times* arts editor, and then I moved back into writing. [An agenda] was also to try and rise the tone of the discourse and to have really good writers who really knew what they were talking about, even though they didn't come from a formal set of arts background, digging a little bit deeper, writing with some kind of discernible style, opinions, elegance. We were fairly in our efforts to give people a voice who hadn't really had one in the mainstream... We did tend to throw out the baby with the bathwater. Anybody who was in the mainstream and had been hanging around for years producing this art or that kind of theatre - we just ignored them, that led to total fury on both sides, and I was being banned from certain theatres because we weren't prepared to give them attention. We were quite young and snotty, but I suppose that was the agenda.

TG: Did you change during the years?

CB: Yes. I think towards the end, going into the 90s, we did mature. We became more inclusive, we realised that we had to also start just giving people good information. Not having a kind of political thesis on every film that came out, and that people like us as much as we might have enjoyed the challenge of a sort of a theme park film festival on anti-apartheid film, we also liked to go to the Steven Spielberg movie, and that we had to actually start to take mainstream arts and culture seriously. I think we became more inclusive and more grown up as we went along, but probably at pace with how society was changing, we were no longer or would no longer consider ourselves as simple standard stuck radical, you know, undergroundish movement. It was just like this, just give people good books, information about great exhibitions, blah blah blah. Which I think the *Mail&Guardian* still does. I still think it is the only newspaper in the country... I don't necessarily like the whole newspaper, but they have a serious arts and culture section.

TG: When I look through the paper it seems to me that it has become more consumer friendly, more like a guide or TV...

CB: We never had TV. We weren't bothering with TV. It was so crap so we wrote off television. I had a TV column. I mean that was the whole point of the TV column was to make it: "We can't take this medium seriously therefore we are going to satirise it and it is going to be about something else". By the time the 90s came along this is a medium that needs to be taken seriously on the informational basis.

TG: Did you get feedback?

CB: Yes, huge feedback. There were either the people who were just frustrated that we wouldn't review their kind of tiled, off Broadway shows or whatever, but sometimes the people who identified completely with those pages were just as annoying, because I think of the time - it seems almost silly now to think that such a time existed - there was so little for anybody particularly on the white, vaguely left-wing. So the *Weekly Mail* just became their newspaper. It was like a family thing, we were quite a big family and people took it very seriously.

As you would know from reading Ivor Powell's reviews, just because we were going to give a voice to the formerly voiceless, we weren't going to say it was all fabulous. I mean there was some quite harsh critiques of plays, and then playwrights and actors. If we didn't say nice things about them all the time they would feel betrayed, like a sort of a family feud thing. Every now and then it would end up in a bar and fisticuffs, I can remember one night trying to get our theatre reviewer who was certainly not up for fisticuffs. He is still a friend of mine, Digby Ricci; he is an English teacher. So, Digby wore rings and had a handbag, and wore white trousers. He wasn't a kind of the lefty, he was a liberal, a conservative liberal, but he was an excellent critic, there were two sort of very kind of macho actors who drunk to much, trying to kill him basically, [laughs] because it got so tense, we had to get him out of there. So there was a huge identification. There were people who saw the *Mail&Guardian/Weekly Mail* as their paper, their place, so if you weren't nice all the time they got very upset.

Talking about Digby reminds me, even way back then, we might have had a loose agenda, but we didn't - I think one of the reasons we worked, there was a real debate going on even within the paper. There wasn't a sort of a monolithic line on anything. Let's say someone like Ivor Powell who is a maverick, complete on his own, a sweet generous person, and there was Digby Ricci who actually came from a liberal conservative background... I'm trying to think who would be a good example of who was like way to the left of that. You would have them all in the same paper, and if two reviews saw the same show and completely disagreed about it politically, artistically, whatever, you would often run both.

TG: How was the arts section looked upon from the other parts of the paper, the other editors?

CB: It was taken very seriously. The editor Anton Harber was very interested and knew quite a lot about arts and culture, not least because his wife is a filmmaker and his sister is an artist. He was really supportive and it was really seen as probably the second strongest section of the paper after the news, much more so than the sport or business. In those days we weren't really interested in sports and business. So the *Mail&Guardian's* reputation I would say absolutely fall on the back of its news and politics and culture.

TG: Maybe we could move on to talk about arts journalism in general. How would you define arts journalism?

CB: Jesus, keep talking?

TG: If you see arts journalism as opposed to news journalism, I'm thinking specifically of it in terms of subjectivity/objectivity, use of sources, closeness to sources, readership and language.

CB: I think the news is perhaps more straightforward, well-written information and kind of critique. Objectivity is about getting your facts right in sort of basic accuracy and basic fairness. But after that I don't believe there is any such thing as objectivity, and it was certainly not we held up or strove for at the *Mail&Guardian*. And people who do hold it up aren't telling you the truth anyway. But obviously I think there is a difference between sort of good subjectivity which is [for example] you pick up a newspaper in London, if you pick up the *Daily Telegraph*, that is being informed by a different kind of political base from the *Guardian*. And they are all up front about that so you know what you are getting. Or the *Sun*. I don't think there is anything wrong. All media are driven by some or other kind of loosely

called political agenda, but you got to be honest about it. That doesn't mean that you can make stuff up as you go along or be completely unfair or partisan if there is some sort of debate raging or difference of opinion. As a journalist it would serve you better to get both sides or four sides or however many there are. But then once you have spoken to everybody, if you put it together in an opinion piece of your own you are going to be extrapolating or making certain conclusions or having certain insides to information.

TG: How about use of sources or closeness to the sources?

CB: A lot of the journalists and critics who worked for that section weren't full time journalists they were academics, lawyers or whatever. Often the very same people whose shows they had to go and critique were friends or acquaintances or at least in the same circle. And I'm sure that we sometimes fell into the trap of either being too generous and giving somebody too much space because somebody knew them, or as I say if you were not generous as your friend thought you should be it could end in a blood feud.

TG: I am thinking because it was quite a small environment and more like a big family and then...

CB: Very incestuous.

TG: It sounds like it could be a problem that you became too close and that it might be a problem judging fairly or correctly?

CB: I don't think any criticism... I mean at one point there is always going to be someone who think it's unfair, and there is no such thing as 'correct opinion'. I think the reason why I worked well as an editor was that I wasn't as close as some of my critics to the arts people and the arts scene and my background and interest was more journalistic. I was able to have a distance from the material that they had swooned. And I can't remember any specific instance, but I certainly would be for the lookout, this just isn't a good picture and what about the 'uh-uh', that was my role to kind of challenge the writers.

I think all journalists who have a beat and a field of whether it is education or local government - I mean that is always a dilemma. I don't think it is any different in the *Sunday Times*. [In] order to properly service your beat, you have to make good contacts, the closer the better, and I suppose some people got it more right than other people in terms of how to juggle their relationships with their profession. You and I might be sitting down having a cup of coffee discussing this thing or the other, and then I put it in the newspaper, and you are like: "Well, I don't think you should have taken that tone. But yes, I see you for coffee again next week, because ultimately I trust you and I think you have integrity, and if I say some things off the record you respect that". So even though I know that you are not always going to be saying something that my department of likes wants you to be saying, I understand how this relationship works.

TG: What is good and what is bad arts journalism?

CB: Just the worst, and again I don't really make the huge distinction between arts journalism and other genres. What upsets me as a reader of newspapers now, is the laziness, the kind of lack of any real intellectual strenuous being visible or even seen as desirable. So to read a review, which doesn't enlighten me, doesn't excite me, doesn't engage me on any level is

bad, because arts journalism might not be on the payroll of the theatre or the exhibition. You are not in anybody's pocket but presumably your job is to engage the reader with what you thought was good or interesting or bad or provocative about that show. I think most newspaper in this country, whoever is writing on the arts or the books, don't have the basic skills to be able to articulate or even describe in interesting and engaging language what the hell they are talking about. So that really infuriates me. It is not a case of do I agree or don't I agree.

TG: It is just too shallow?

CB: Shallow, shallow, lazy, not really having the grasp of the material, not really caring.

TG: So you can say that knowledge and interest could be two words to describe good arts journalism?

CB: Yeah. I think in South Africa you do make exceptions all the time because of all our history and where everybody is coming from and huge levels of illiteracy both amongst coloured[s] [and] black[s]. There aren't these vast European style reading populations. The discourse is low, the level of the debate is fairly low. It is about personalities, that kind of polemics, kind of rhetoric and obviously I think the people in the media should be the front-runners trying to grow it, however slowly, into something more enduring that is going to provoke people. I don't think the *Weekly Mail* style of journalism... and I am not saying it was always brilliant, sometimes it was boring or crap or unfair, but it didn't lead to anything else. It didn't kick-start a whole bunch of other people who went out into [other] newspapers. I mean in some ways it did. The political editor at the *Sunday Times* was a trainee at the *Weekly Mail* when I was there. There are a dozen examples who are very hot now, because they had that very imaginative start at the *Weekly Mail*. Most of the people writing for us weren't staff members and weren't even journalists - It just kind of went prthh.

TG: What goals do arts journalism have?

CB: To both be a conduit of pure information about what is going on, where, who is making it, why, and to do that in a lively, engaging, interesting way. Not that every article has to be a huge new puff-out. Because I think that more so now than ever people need to stop obsessing so much with pure politics and engage with society through the more cultural aspects, whether that is sport or art or education whatever. We come with so much pure political baggage in this country, it is really hard to refocus our gaze on other aspects of our society, or to see how arts and culture can give us, if not answers of who we are but certain ways, interesting questions.

Arts and culture have never been taken seriously in this country. Only as tools of struggle whether it was apartheid tools, fascist monumentalist buildings and operas and blah blah blah, which all had an underlying political agenda. Or the ANC who as we now discover was only interested in the arts and culture as a weapon for the struggle. They are not interested in arts and culture as an eminent of society, [which] is very disappointing. We don't have a population which is by and large engaged with, I mean we have a population who is engaged in music in a big, big way, whether that is kwaito or gospel singing or whatever. It would be interesting if those things that people experience and do and love that are very visceral, if there were some sort of intellectual or more formal written kind of record or analysis of what that is about, and have those two things happening together. South Africans don't generally

because we haven't been given the opportunities or the tools, [to] engage with an art exhibition in the way that people would. Because I just spent two months in Europe, I'm using this as an example. But you know what it is like going to an gallery on a rainy Sunday afternoon, and there is all the people, and they are not like all kind of academics and rich people. People will push chairs and kind of like torn raincoats, and engage at some level with the art being produced in a society. We don't really have that. The media doesn't find it a profitable line, we can't get advertisements for arts pages. This is a sports country, that's the culture. And I don't think the government, the new government, does anything to change that. And I don't think they are interested in changing it.

TG: What do you find are the main hindrances to arts journalism? Both in general terms and in a more specific South African context?

CB: Lack of interest. There are precious few resources, governmental and private, being put into the arts. So we sort of stumble across it, every now and again you see something or you hear something that just blows you away, and you think this should be all over the newspapers and magazines and TV programs and, this is the happening thing or person of the moment. It is fine to have the critics kind of weighing in, but then to also have the interview with the artist on television maybe in quite a light, shallow, way, but in an interesting, entertaining way. And then to have a piece about them in a magazine about their favourite wardrobe. I don't think there is one that is legitimate and one that isn't, but there is no critical mass making us interested in these people and their things. I'm sure you've been around this question, about the Market Theatre, what happened, the people at the Market Theatre will endlessly blame audiences for being a bunch of pussies who don't want to go to town after dark. I'm one of those people who would blame the Market Theatre, and say that's crap. When there has been a production which has captured the public imagination, people do to find out about it and people do go and fill up that theatre. And in between the Market Theatre put on some whole bunch of half decent rubbish. I mean, it's like: "You know, you have lost your way and don't really know how to re-imagine yourselves as a commercial viable theatre, so don't blame us for not being interested in coming".

TG: Do you think that would be one of the reasons [why] arts are not considered important. [It] might be difficult to find a place for the arts now, because previously it was a lot about the struggle in the arts as well, and now you don't have the same struggle anymore.

CB: Yeah. I'm sure it's a short-term thing. Obviously short term in the sense of a couple of generations. I do think it is a case of artists rather than audiences struggling to find ways of describing themselves and what is going on in a way that is fresh. Never mind relevant, but [art that] actually makes you kind of identify, sort of say: "I think that is funny, I absolutely recognise that situation, or that's bad and I recognise that" but it all seems to be these terrible kind of big cardboard clichés.

I think it was Albie Sachs [who] said in an article in the *Sunday Times* a couple of weeks ago that the only artists whose work he really enjoyed at the moment in literature are white Afrikaans women. And I thought that is a very interesting comment. My theory would be that white Afrikaners in a way have nothing to loose. They have been the kind of the nazis, they have been painted as the worst people on earth. They are not heroic. They are not the good and the true - I mean they might have been good and true and fabulous people - maybe that has liberated their literature to be real stories about real people without them having to worry all the time about, whether this is correct or whether this is appropriate or whether this fits

into the new political paradigms. If I have to pick up one more book about sort of white-black relationships...

My favourite book this year, South African book, was by Marguerite Poland, called *Iron Love*. It's about a boys boarding school in Grahamstown, loosely based on a real boarding school there in 1913, in the colonial era. There is not one black person, there is not one black character in that book. Because there wouldn't be. It's a story about boys, these 13, 14 year old boys growing up in this very austere pre-war colonial environment. And reality is they wouldn't have had any contact with black people, every now and then somebody comes in and clears up the table while they are sitting there talking. That would have been real in 1913. And it's also because she is a fantastic author and it is very well written. But in a lot of literature or theatre one feels this sort of angst - this is about catharsis. Obviously catharsis is an acceptable element in drama, but if you are going to comment it from a purely self-conscious head point of view - I mean art is not self-conscious. Good art is not self-conscious. And it is not intellectual. It can be an intellectual experience, but it's got to come from story telling.

TG: Where does the political [aspect] of the arts come into it if you say art is not an intellectual thing?

CB: I think why it used to work - not all of it, there as a lot of crap then too - we lived in a kind of a very dynamic, dramatic, catastrophic time. So when good playwrights decided to tackle the issues of being in prison, being in the army. It might have been loosely described as political play, but it was coming from real, empirical, anecdotal experience and feelings. And real conversations that was being inspired by the kind of conversation, four white boys in the army in 1987 in Angola might have really had, because sometimes the playwright might have been that boy in the army in Angola, so he had an ear for the language. Or you know the Robben Island play that was coming from people who had sort of been there, seen that, so in a way I think it was a disservice to that kind of theatre that we labelled it political theatre. It was just good theatre, really. And some of those plays are still being performed throughout the world, because they are good. The politics of any arts has got to be perhaps a sort of a subtext rather than hit you over the head with it. It's got to be the subtext to some sort of human life, some story. Then it got a chance of working. People don't go to the theatre to hear a speech, even though in the 80s some very bad theatre got audiences, because people felt they should either should go and hear that speech because it made them feel better or worse. And sometimes you did kind of feel worse. Or they went there because the country had information to such a degree through censorship that sometimes they did go there because they did want to hear a political speech because it was the only place left in the country where you could hear one. It was rhetoric. You don't need theatre as a kind of channel for politics anymore.

TG: What would you say is the relation between entertainment and the arts?

CB: That's interesting. I think all art should be entertaining at some level. Even if it doesn't have sparkles the tight trip. People can go to the new hot Hollywood movie and be gloriously entertained and the next day to the Marc Chagall exhibition and be fantastically entertained, even in a different way. Or you can read an airport novel and be entertained, or you can be grappling with J.M Coetzee's latest sort of dissertation on animal life and be entertained, I suppose. I've never been entertained by it, I love his novels. All art presupposes an element of entertainment at different levels, at different dimensions and I don't believe anybody can read

any book that they are not extracting some pleasure from. Unless you are reading a text book, no, I don't know anybody [who] goes to a book looking only for something that is going to be good for them, you know, there's got to be an element of pleasure taking.

TG: And if you think about the entertainment industry, if you think of the history of it from the 80s until today. [Have] the arts become more of an entertainment, more of a light type of art?

CB: I'm probably the wrong person to take the other view because I don't have the formal training in arts myself. I'm probably a typical example of one of those kind of post-modern[ists] who do not mourn the passing of Latin or poetry, because that is not where I came from. I'm quite a populist in that regard. That is not to say I don't want to be provoked and entertained, and that is not to say I'm not interested in intelligent art, because I am. But there is no doubt that all art is being affected of that sort of lightness you were talking about, or you don't have to be informed by or referring to a deep biblical history in order to make your art kind of quick, ephemeral disposable. Again because I'm not a critic, a formal critic, and I love art, I mean painting, plastic arts - I went to this art gallery in London a few weeks ago and there was Tracey Emin's bed. It is this new hot post-Damien Hirst artist in London who had a nervous breakdown, and basically went to bed for six weeks. And this, the way her bed was after six weeks without her bathing or getting up, [it] was now in the arts gallery. It was this kind of stained sheets and old tampons and cigarette butts and this is art. And I'm infuriated by that kind of art. I mean, I think it's a very interesting object for analysis, but I don't think it fulfils any of the criteria for art.

TG: Because?

CB: Because it's not in any way transformative. I mean, I think at some level art has to make you think, make you feel. It is not transformative because it makes you think for as long as you are looking at it. It is no more than the sum of its parts. So you can look it and say: "Okay. This is telling me that this was a person in pain and in a hard place". Anybody who stay in a bed for a week, you know, their bed would look like hers. And then? And what else? Big void, big vacuum. You know, I do think it says quite a lot about the way our post-modern society thinks. It's trapped in this horrible ironic despair. And then there are other pieces of art, 20th century sort of art which were very new but which has quite complex elements. Even if you don't fully understand them, you're moved by them, you're in some way kind of provoked by them. And again that is probably much about opinion, which is good, which is bad.

TG: What do you think of the state of the arts in South Africa today?

CB: It's tragic. Going back to what we were saying earlier, you've got a population who has never been allowed to enjoy and access lots of arts, either because of apartheid censorship or because of ANC government's lack of interest: "This is not important to us, so we are not going to put time and money and efforts into it". It is a side-show. Plus this is a out of the way country, like anywhere else that is not New York or kind of Barcelona or Paris. It is arts and culture that is going to be on a smaller scale. It is not the centre of the artistic world. It never will be. That's okay. I can accept that. But there's been no real attention paid to informing the public or educating the public to be interested. The two most interesting and vibrant forms of arts in South Africa are music and books. I do think we produce some interesting literature. And theatre's kind of gone off a bit. Film is a fucking disaster, always has been, still is.

TG: When I started to think about this thesis I had this idea that it would be easier now - for previously suppressed people it would be easier access to speak up and show their art and also that the media would be able to uplift to a larger degree today. And then I find that it is almost the opposite, because for one thing the funding is not there. It seems like it's actually going the other way in the media as well. It seems like what is being written about now is the major Hollywood films and TV, it was actually more about it in the *Mail&Guardian* or the *Weekly Mail* in the 80s of that, because I guess it was your political agenda to try and uplift what was there.

CB: I don't have any answers, and I think you're right, and I think that sort of the low arts, the kind of the films and television are - good TV is good TV, a good movie is a good movie however popular it is. So it's not like one or the other, but we haven't managed to take along some of the more esoteric art forms with us. It's sad, but I think it is kind of understandable in a way. As I said, there is this tension between the art community and the public - I am no longer involved in arts and culture journalism, but I imagine that when the national orchestra closed down or when the ballet company closed down a few months ago, that they probably [had] all this displaced anger [and] getting nowhere to put it. And they probably did put it partly on government and partly on the public.

I'm not a great fan of ballet. I don't understand it, it is quite boring, it doesn't appeal to me. But I've been to the ballet enough times in this country to know some people who do know more about ballet, [and] what we're getting most of the time and what we were getting even when the ballet company twenty years ago were getting every resource from government - [it] would be exceptional if one or two dancers went on to better things and went to places. You weren't getting anything terribly special and even getting very a conservative repertoire, very old fashioned stuck in the classical mould. You'd have the kind of conservative *übervolk* of apartheid [who went] to the ballet, because they believed that put them into some sort of civilised sort of Western context. It couldn't have been that many that actually enjoyed it, they would have kept coming back. So I think we've been doing it for the wrong reasons. It wasn't because they kind of knew something or loved more what they were seeing, it just made them feel civilised to go watch someone hopping about in pink tutu.

We've always been a very defensive, self-conscious society and in that regard, because politics has up until recently just been the strongest life-force in this country at one time, it had to be. Now we don't really know how else to do it. Except to get on the sports-field and you know, kill someone. It got a lot to do with the temperament. You can argue a whole day about where that came from and why, but temperamentally we are not a nation that is natural except in music. That has a natural love for all people across you know, classes, a love of literature, a love of theatre, a love of dance. Music works here. Music [is] exciting and I think people do go. And again the national orchestra, I had a friend who played in the orchestra and he would say: "We got to stop blaming the audiences for not coming". Like the ballet company. They had a very conservative repertoire, you know, it was the three B's, and a bit of Mozart and a bit of Vivaldi and, you know, nobody ever seemed to bust out into the 20th century very often or kind of mix up the paradigms or did anything really to entice people, you know.

TG: It seems it mainly fitted into the Western conceptions.

CB: But what they didn't realise was [that] even the Western conceptions had moved along, so they were all kind of mimicking something they thought somebody in London would do. But meanwhile somebody in London might have done that 30 years ago, and now they also got their Nigel Kennedys and mixing it all up, and have it modernised in terms of their programs and their images. And taken a lot of new young audiences with them, you know.

TG: Which way will it go with the arts in South Africa and with arts journalism? What could be the role of arts journalism or what should it be in this country?

CB: Well, to have some... [laughs]. As I say from my personal experience, when I moved to the biggest national newspaper in the country, I did fight for a couple of years to get proper arts coverage going and it never did. They were never interested. I don't know what has to happen, it's such a symbiotic thing. It's like if they don't feel that people are interested in arts, then they are not going to have substantial arts coverage, because it is not profitable. At the same time, how much can certain art forms really take off in this country without the support from arts journalism? What role could arts journalism have? Well, we first need to get some arts journalism.

It's interesting to me that the *Mail&Guardian* never grew any bigger than it has, because I think there was a certain assumption which was a very maybe uh... Outlandish assumption... that... although we were very marginalised in terms of a certain sensibility in the 1980s. And in the 1990s the *Mail&Guardian* would become into its own, and it would become more of a mainstream view. It's never really happened. Not politically, not culturally. It's still 40 000 people. You buy that newspaper if you're interested in what it has to. It's a small, small community.

TG: Who did you write for? Who did you write for in the *Weekly Mail*? Who was the audience? Is it the same audience now?

CB: The same now? I don't know actually. You would have to ask someone at the *Mail&Guardian* what they're latest demographics are. Predominantly white, predominantly kind of like, at least one degree, educated, predominately middle-class. Not necessarily young, I mean either, lots of students, some other race groups, but the sensibility of the editors who were kind of like white, vaguely left-wing, Jewish, urban boys tended to put that stamp on it, that was the audience. We liked to think in the 1980s that we were going to have this great cross-racial readership. I'm not really sure how much that succeeded. I don't know the figures.

I know that black loosely speaking intellectuals, activists in the 1980s absolutely did read the *Mail&Guardian*. The *Weekly Mail* went to Robben Island, it was considered [important] amongst [important people]. So we had quite a powerful readership. And one of the ironies for me was moving to the *Sunday Times* which before 1994 I would not have touched with a long pole. I did not read it, I would never ask for a job there. If you were a self-respecting journalist in the 1980s, you wouldn't touch the SABC, you wouldn't touch the *Sunday Times*, because they were "his master's voice". Over the five years that I've been in the *Sunday Times* I find it very ironic that the *Sunday Times* was the paper for the white people, and now it's the paper for the new South Africa. And they made a seamless, utterly shameless switch for one to the other. The *Sunday Times* readership is now more black than white. Since I worked on the editorial pages I know that anybody in the government or in business or in NGO sector who wanted their opinion in that newspaper [who was bought by as many people

as possible] would come to me first. They weren't interested in the *Weekly Mail*. They weren't interested in the *Independent* or the *Sowetan*. We had the numbers. So suddenly it became the new South African newspaper. Undeservedly so, perhaps.

TG: Is that why you moved to the *Sunday Times*?

CB: No, I didn't actually. I moved because by the end of the 1994, it was [an] exciting hard work year, phew - I had been there ten years, it was a very close family and we slept together, and played together, and worked together, and by the end of my ten years it felt like I needed to leave home. It felt like a dysfunctional family, so it was for purely personal reasons. My first mentor, a guy called Ken Owen, who had taught me at the *Rand Daily Mail* and the *Sunday Express* before I went to the *Weekly Mail*, was the editor of the *Sunday Times*. And he was a very difficult guy politically, in a weird place, but he was an absolutely brilliant journalist and I learned a lot from him. And I bumped into him at a party at the end of 1994 and he said: "Bring your TV-column to the *Sunday Times*". And I was just ready to make a move. So that was why I moved.

Then the *Sunday Times* still wasn't the cool, evidently it [still] is not a cool paper. It is too big and important to be cool, it certainly didn't have the ability and credibility that the *Mail&Guardian* had. And in some ways it still doesn't. In terms of where the society has moved, it doesn't need the *Mail&Guardian* anymore. It needs the *Sunday Times*. So, all the most powerful people read it and they might like say: "Oh this is crap" when they read the first three pages you know, about neighbours slinging insults at each other, people running off with other people's wives. The *Sunday Times* is an interesting animal, because it calls itself the paper for the people and it's a huge paper and it tries to appeal to all sorts of people in different sections. So if you want the Jerry Springer kind of like version of the world, you can get it in the first section of the newspaper. If you want politics, you got some very good political writers. We got the best legal correspondent in the country, and we got a life style section, which is more kind of urban middle-class kind of mobile disposable income people. Then you got the magazine, which is the 15-years-olds who want to read about new pop bands. The pages I was working on [were] taken quite seriously. But you could also ignore that and go straight to the babe on the back page. I think most people buy the *Sunday Times* and don't read it, or they go straight to the business section, or the sport or the trash. [It] is just a whole big mixture.

TG: I just got one example of your TV-column, "The week on the box" from 1990. And I was wondering if you could comment on that in relation to what we have been talking about.

CB: God, what was I talking about? A funny thing you chose this one, because it seems to me to be one of those weeks where I sat there going, "Oh, fuck, I have not a clue what I am going to write about?" I don't think there is... Why did you choose it?

TG: It was more by chance [I chose it]. To be honest I didn't start reading this because I thought it was about television and I thought: "Well, TV is not very interesting". And then I started reading some of them after knowing that you were the arts editor, and I saw that it wasn't actually about TV, but that it was a more political thing. There was another one I wanted to bring, and I had copied this one instead, so...

CB: I am just relieved to hear that you have seen a few others. That wouldn't be my proudest moment, that one. What I was describing in the Weather Report, [is] the way South Africans

have this way of speaking whether it is about the weather, or about aids, about prostitution or a new book. The media do it a lot. They hide, politicians do it, NGO's do it, they hide behind this terrible jargon. You might have a look into the articles people submit to you, where sometimes as an editor I would have to read it three times to [understand] what they are talking about. It is not because I am stupid and they are clever. It is because they can't speak, they can't write and again, there is a tragedy in our education system and this hyper-politicisation and policy-like language and everybody does it! From the weather reader to the health department. People here aren't very articulate.

[...]

TG: Just one last thing. You said you studied journalism.

CB: No, I never studied journalism. I went to Wits and did a BA in History and English.

TG: Did you go directly from Wits to the *Rand Daily Mail*?

CB: No. I didn't actually. I did it the other way around. I went to college in Durban when I left school to do journalism. I was a terrible student. Then I just got a small job in a small local newspaper for a year, and then I got on to the *Rand Daily Mail* as part of their intern program. So I only went to University when I was about 27 and I was already working in the *Weekly Mail*, and then I came back to them. I was writing a column for them all the time while I was at University.

[...]

CB: I would imagine what Matthew [Krouse] would say is that the pressure is different now. The *Weekly Mail* was never funded as such. I'm not the person to know how the money worked. But it was almost beside the point actually trying making money, and we had this rather important esoteric little place in the world. We were a very small staff, we got paid nothing, it was all about the prestige of being there and taken seriously, which attracted some real pains in the arse. By the 90s we went into partnership, proper financial partnership, with the *Guardian*. And then the *Guardian* was like "We're not a charity" see, you got to make some money here. So the pressure did change. There was a time when as long as the *Weekly Mail* was managing to come out, for some weeks it almost didn't, because it was being banned or censored or the police would raid the offices just before we were going to the printer - We had the kind of accuracy which a lot of international organisations had vested interests in keeping us going and when we came into the 90s we had no particular political accuracy anymore. We just had to stand on empty feet financially, which would explain why most of the consumerist - the people are not going to read what we think they should be, and people don't read. I still do think that the *Mail&Guardian* know what they are talking about.

**INTERVIEW WITH SHAUN DE WAAL, THE MEDIA MILL, JOHANNESBURG,
04.11.2000**

**Previously arts editor in the *Mail&Guardian*
Presently arts journalist in the *Mail&Guardian***

SHAUN DE WAAL (SdW): I studied at Wits University, where I did a very general BA, varying from Politics to History of Art, to Psychology to Drama and Film, Linguistics. And then I ended up majoring in English, with sub majors in Psychology and Drama and Film, and then I did honours in English. Then I didn't want to go to the army, so I left the country and I potted around Europe for some time. I came back to the country in 1988, at which point I wasn't sure of whether I was going to stay or whether I was going to go back to London, because I had got quite settled in London by that point, or Barcelona or something. I didn't know what I was going to do, but I just ended up staying here. In 1989 I got a job here. Well it was then the *Weekly Mail*, on a part time basis to do the entertainment guide, which was basically a round up of music, movies, theatre, fine art. And then I started doing book reviews and theatre reviews and that was basically how it all started.

TERESA GROGAN (TG): And then you've been here since.

SdW: And I've been here ever since, exactly.

TG: How would you define arts journalism?

SdW: I think there are basically two kinds of story that you write for arts pages, features and reviews. There aren't many other options in terms of what one does. Features can be personality focused or they can be information focused, where basically we get information about particular events or, you know, stuff that's going on. Reviews obviously are related to a specific art factor, a movie or a show or something like that.

More important than the consideration of those kinds of genres, in which one writes, is one's conception of what arts journalism does. There has been a lot of debate on this paper, the other papers seem to not care around how one conceives of what art journalism does. The kind of populist notion of the way arts journalism should work is that it's like - art in whatever form is a kind of hamburger and what arts journalism should be doing is telling you where the best hamburger in town is. In other words what people want arts journalism to do is say this is a shit movie, this is a good movie, go to the good movie. That's all they want to know. They want someone to help make their entertainment choices.

Now, obviously that is still a part of what one wants to do in arts journalism, but to me doing that is meaningless unless there is a larger perspective on how culture works in society as a whole. And I think one needs to think very carefully about what culture does in a society, how it articulates that society's needs, fears, dreams, hopes. What it says about the soul of a society. What arts journalism needs to do and should do, is to find some way of asking the question [about] what this work says about our society and where we're at, what we're doing - and how we see ourselves. Because in many ways that is what art does, whether it's rock and roll or whether it's conceptual art or whether it's writing, it comes out of individual lives lived in a particular society, and it says something about those lives and that society. And what arts

journalism and what criticism specifically should be doing, is finding a way to talk about that and opening out the possible debates around those kinds of issues.

[Arts journalism has] a valuable role in explaining, in interpreting what's going on, because it's the right of the artist in whatever work he or she produces to not have to explain the work. To make work that possibly comes from the subconscious, that is possibly very challenging, that surprises, that maybe work that the artist himself or herself doesn't really know what [it] means. And it's the right of the artist not to have to explain himself or herself at all, I think. What we need critics for, is to make that work accessible to the public. To create a community of response in which people are able to approach the work, to talk about it, begin to understand what it is, the context that it fits into, and why people should be making that kind of work in any particular time or space and place. And I think that if art criticism or art journalism is not doing that, uh... then it really is no better than the guide to the best hamburger in town. That's my feeling on the matter.

TG: What makes good arts journalism or what makes a good arts journalist?

SdW: Good arts journalism needs have the kind of sensibility that is sympathetic to the arts. To me, it is a world away from news journalism, it's not about collecting facts. Obviously in some stories facts need to be collected and facts need to be put together, but it is essentially about a process of interpretation. And whether you're doing that in the form of a feature where you're talking to a particular artist and placing them in a context, or whether you're doing it in a form of a review where you're taking a particular thing like a movie and you're saying this is what I think about it. The writer needs to have some kind of sympathy with the art form, needs to understand where that art form is coming from, needs to have, I think, a pretty broad general knowledge about the world. [S/he] needs to have as many reference points as possible to draw on to make the necessary links between the internal workings of a particular work and the society in which it functions.

It's not to say that people need to have intense academic training on these kind of things, because I think very often academic type critics can deaden an approach to a particular artwork and they complicate matters rather than simplify [it]. But you do need to have a sense of the history of that particular art form. I read in one of the newspapers the other day, one of the Martin Scorsese films, *Casino* or *Goodfellas* or something was coming up on one of the channels, and the writer said "oh, just another boring old gangster film". Obviously he had never seen the film, had no idea who Martin Scorsese was, had no idea why Martin Scorsese was important in the history of American film, had no sense of the art form in general, had no sense of the context in which this operates. That just leads to meaningless utterances being made.

I've spoken to a lot of people about this since I started reviewing movies about a year and a half ago, because it's a field where everyone has an opinion. Everyone goes to movies, everyone reads the reviews, because they want to know what movie to go and see this weekend. And people approach you and say "hey, I read your review on such and such, great movie, you were spot on", or they say "hey, I disagreed with your review, how could you recommend that movie when it was such crap", or "how come you hated that movie so much, when it was actually quite good". And that is good, because its part of the community of response, of people allowing themselves to think about these things, its not just about going in there and consuming it like a hamburger. It's about going in there and allowing the artwork to

help you think about things that you might not have thought about before, or to allow you a new perspective on something that is part of your life or your society or culture.

I used to tell this to the trainees, they used to say “what is a review?”, and I’d say “well, you’ve got to do three things: First of all you’ve got to tell us what the movie is about. Number one. Number two, you’ve got to tell us whether you like it or not and number three, you’ve got to tell us why. And it really doesn’t matter what order you do that in, and it really doesn’t matter how you muddle it up, and how you use the one thing to explain another thing. But that is fundamentally what you need to do”.

The review or any kind of journalism of this kind is not scripture written from on high. It is the opinion of an individual. The first thing that you have got to do without which nothing can follow, is make an interesting page in a newspaper, something that people are going to want to read. And in the course of explaining why you like or dislike something, you say a lot about yourself. You say a lot about where you are coming from, and you also give the reader a sense of whether your opinion is justified or not justified. You have to say why you think this is a shit movie. And that is the task, to be able to articulate your personal viewpoint in more general terms. In terms that will translate to other people so they can say “okay, I can see why he didn’t like that movie, now okay, maybe I disagree with him, because I actually like Kung Fu movies”, but at least they get a sense of where you’re actually coming from. The business of criticism is coming from a personal viewpoint. But nobody’s interested in the viewpoint of someone who just walks out of a movie and says “oh it was a shit movie”. If you can’t explain why, and if you can’t locate something in it’s larger context, then it’s meaningless, then it’s just the opinion of Joe Soap who walked out the movie.

I think to make arts journalism as good as possible, one needs to have a very broad frame of reference. You’re not going to be a good book reviewer if you don’t read a lot of books. You’re not going to be a good movie reviewer if you don’t see a lot of movies. You need to immerse yourself in that art form, you need to understand it, you need to have some sympathy for it. I mean, I don’t go review some woman’s portraits of parliamentarians, because I’m not interested in painted portraiture. I don’t have any sympathy for it. I don’t review rap CDs because I don’t like rap, whether its good bad or indifferent, I don’t like it. I just don’t like the genre, there’s just no point in my doing that.

TG: Do you skip movies as well?

SdW: Do I skip movies? Basically the way that it works, is that I’ve got to do a lead review for that page, so a movie of the week or a not the movie of the week or whatever, as long as there is a main review. There are about five or six previews a week, if I go to all of those previews - and half of them are shit movies - I start hating the movies in general. And second of all, when I sit down to write my review, I’ve forgotten important details about individual movies, they start getting confused in my mind and I can’t focus. So I try and keep it to a minimum, as in two or three movies a week, and I try pick out of the movies that are most likely to feature as a movie of the week. And I have someone else, Neil Sonnekus, thank god, who’s prepared to go to all the movies that I don’t want to see. Sometimes one has no choice, I have to look at what’s coming up, what’s showing when, and try to make a selection on that. But I don’t want to see more than three movies a week, because there’s nothing more soul-destroying than sitting through shit movie after shit movie.

I've had the same experience with books, for ten years, eleven years, I reviewed I don't know how many, innumerable books and it got to the point where I started thinking "this is actually too much". You know, it's fine to read books for review and all the rest of it, but at a certain point one has got to be doing this partly at least for pleasure, and you've got to be doing it because you want to read the book. And I think that that's an important thing, because what you're communicating in the review is whether you got pleasure from this movie or from this book or from this CD. That is what you're trying to communicate to someone. You're trying to communicate that "I got pleasure from this artefact" or "I did not get pleasure from this artefact, and this is why I think its good, bad or indifferent".

TG: What goals do arts journalists have [compared to other genres]?

SdW: Well, I can't really talk about other forms of journalism, because I haven't really been involved in them. I mean, except in so far as I have done some news stories which basically were just to inform people, opinion pieces which were basically to debate particular issues. Arts journalism, I think it's a combination of informing people, and as I was saying earlier, finding a way to try and articulate something about the soul and the lives of particular individuals in a particular society. I use the word soul loosely because I can't think of a better term. But in the culture, in our culture, with all its many facets and all the many different things that are going on, with all the battles between different ideological points and perspectives, what art and culture in general is doing, is finding the way for humanity to reflect upon itself. Because that is very often done in an almost subconscious or an opaque or a taboo kind of a way, it's not always terribly clear to people.

What art journalism is doing, is helping to make that more accessible, that's part of what it is doing. The other part of what it's doing is helping people get some sense of what they may enjoy and what they may not enjoy and say to them "you know, I'm saying here's a fabulous book I've recently read, I think you people should read it". "So and so book has just come out, well actually he's a big known author, but it's shit", this is my view, you can agree or you can disagree. I mean it really is not a scriptural pronouncement. It's part of a whole, and should be part of a whole cultural debate of where people... It's a constant process of uh, opinions being formed, of building on what has gone before it. Provide people with that kind of critical information, that they can use to form their own opinions. That's primarily what I think it's doing.

TG: Have the goals changed for you during the years in the *Mail&Guardian* specifically thinking of the political situation?

SdW: No, I don't think they have fundamentally changed. There was a time when the debate about whether culture as a weapon of the struggle was an important thing. Many people were producing culture that they felt was a way of advancing the struggle. Part of the role of the cultural critic was to look at this and say first of all: "Is this notion of culture as a weapon of the struggle, is this a useful notion for us at this time, is it useful to culture, is it useful to the struggle?". Second of all what else is out there. What does society at large produce in terms of culture? Certainly in the 80s, it was important to debate issues like culture as a weapon of the struggle, that's fine but is criticism also a weapon of the struggle? I don't know, in some ways it is and in some ways it's not. I think it's important to have political criticism, I think it is important to have a political and an ideological insight into the material that you are criticising. If I go and see a movie like *The Patriot*, I need to be able to recognise that as crude American propaganda. I need to be able to see that in the movie and I need to be able to say

that. That kind of political viewpoint is important. People will say “oh well, who cares, you know, if it buggers around with history. All we care about is, is it an enjoyable movie or is it not an enjoyable movie”. Well I’m sorry.

TG: Could you say that there are two ways of being political, what you chose to write about, and what the content of the art itself is?

SdW: Of course everything is political in that sense. One can view these things in a very, very broad way, that everything political is not to say that everything is political in the same way. Because some friends will for instance make some interesting points, maybe about gender politics. You may be able to look at a particular movie and say, you know, a film like *Romance*, that there was a lot of debate about female sexuality. So it’s very interesting to see what different people felt about it, what straight men felt about it, what gay men felt about it, what straight women felt about it, and to see different perspectives coming out. What one has to get away from, is a kind of Stalinist mentality of: “Well, this is what it is and this is what we should think about it”. To me that is a completely pointless, pointless exercise. The whole point is to allow us through art, through criticism, through the culture of debate, to allow us to reflect upon ourselves, who we are, what is happening in our society, what do all of these things mean. There’s this vast canopy of consciousness at play out there in terms of culture. People [are] making art in all its many different forms, and we need to find ways to talk about that. Because this is all part of human consciousness and we need to be able to approach it from whichever angle seems appropriate at that moment. We need to be able to look at it from whatever political way and deconstruct from within, fine, that’s the appropriate way to do it, sometimes one strategy is more successful than another strategy. You do what you can and then you go on to the next thing. As I said, it’s not scripture, it’s part of the endless ongoing dialogue of humanity with itself.

TG: How do you think art and arts journalism has changed in the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian*?

SdW: I think that the arts journalism has followed a similar trajectory to the paper as a whole. In the 80s and the early 90s when the paper was trying to find a voice for sectors of the society that had been repressed and suppressed, and it was looking at it on a political front, it was kind of saying “okay, this is the news you will not get anywhere else”. It was also saying in terms of the arts “we’re the only paper that’s going to write about rock n roll at Jameson’s”, “we’re the paper who are going to write about alternative art forms and things that are not in the mainstream. We are going to discover things that you don’t know about. We are going to look at culture in a very broad, complicated way, rather than just sitting there”. Most of the mainstream papers at that point were doing a couple of theatre reviews, a couple of movie reviews, a couple of opera reviews, a couple of ballet reviews. We were saying, “what is the role of ballet and opera in this society?” We were saying “what does it mean when the bulk of our white intelligentsia is getting drunk every weekend at Jameson’s in front of five or six rock and roll bands? What are these rock and roll bands saying to the disaffected youth that other genres are not saying to them?” So I mean there are various levels of interrogation that you can use to approach, to try and work out what the context is, what is being said, how are these different things being articulated.

What has changed I think is that post 94, what one has seen basically is that the role of the paper as the voice of the voiceless or as the paper that went to places that other papers wouldn’t go, has changed. The people who were in hiding in 1989 are now in power. And so

the role of the paper has changed. Now what the paper is trying to do, successfully or unsuccessfully, depending on how you see it, has been to try and insert itself into the mainstream. Instead of being the paper that was standing outside the mainstream, saying: "We're going to give you what other papers don't give you", it's saying "we too have a voice along with these other newspapers" and to put itself into the mainstream and to say "we are now part of the central discourse of South African life". Instead of the arts pages, focusing solely on, not that we ever did focus solely on it, but it still had a large emphasis being totally on the alternative, the unusual underground things that were outside the mainstream.

It is now a mixture, what's in the mainstream, what's outside of the mainstream and trying to come to terms with a sense of the arts very much in general as a whole. So that we make culture pages that will cover everything from kwaito to opera, and that we will be able to hopefully start moving between all the different genres and across the different boundaries, and allowing them to sort of talk to each other, reflect upon each other. To find a way of bringing together some of the little factions that exist. I mean, art pages have got to be inevitably, very diverse and very eclectic. You have a little group of white artists who are the leading conceptual artists in South Africa. On the other hand, you got a huge black youth culture that revolves around kwaito. These are all part of the arts and culture in our society today, and we've got to somehow be able to reflect on all of those things. And try and work out why and how those are meaningful in our society today - trying to keep it as broad as possible, it changes all the time. That is the fundamental difference between when I started with the paper in arts journalism and where we are now today. In those days it was about making space for things that were being excluded from hegemonic culture. Now it's about trying to work out what the hell our culture is as a whole. Who are we, where do we fit in to the world, what is special about us. How do we get all these different fragments that are part of this jigsaw puzzle? How do we get them to fit together? Can they ever fit together? How does it work? How do we make sense of this?

I don't think the fundamental critical projects in terms of what arts journalism does is any different, but I think that the type of analysis that we are trying to perform has changed in that respect. You know, we are an emerging culture in a particular globalised world, and we need to look at all of those things. We need to look at, you know, we're trying to work out where do we fit into things, are we just a cultural colony of the United States? Or do we have some unique aspects of our culture that we need to nurture that say something to us specifically. How does it all work? This is what we're asking now, or what we should be asking now.

TG: What do you think are the hindrances to good arts journalism?

SdW: I think fundamentally, as I said before, it's the hamburger approach to culture. It's very often bad writing and it's very often the ignorance of critics and writers. They don't have wide frames of reference, they don't know their history, they don't know their politics. I think that people need to be very well informed on an individual level. I think life is a process of constant self-education, and to read criticism and stuff that is just stewing in it's own complacency, to me that is just really, really dull. That I think is the greatest hindrance to it, a sense of complacency, you're just telling people whether they're going to enjoy the new extravaganza at Sun City, you know. Journalism that does not ask questions is boring. So I think those are the hindrances really. It's that kind of ignorance, that kind of lack of engagement. You know, you can't perform meaningful cultural journalism unless you're engaged in some sense with society as a whole. The people used to say in the old days, "oh well, we don't want to politicise this, you know, opera, ballet, we don't want it to be

politicised”, it’s like it exists in some separate heavenly little space of its own. That is bad journalism as far as I am concerned. Everything connects, it’s got to connect, you can’t make those connections and if you can’t do it in an intelligent way, then I’m not interested in reading what you are writing, basically.

I’m lucky enough. Over the last eleven, twelve years I’ve worked on a newspaper that was prepared to publish the kind of thing that I was interested in writing. I would hate to go and work for a newspaper where that kind of stuff is not acceptable. I don’t know what the general hindrances are outside of journalism itself, except lack of education, lack of interest in the arts in general. People are very often simply not interested in fine art, opera, ballet, whatever. So I think that if there’s a public lack of interest, if there is a critical ignorance, and if there are media, whether its newspaper, radio, television particularly, that are not interested in complex issues and in debating those very complex issues, I think that is a hindrance to good journalism. There’s simply no spaces being provided, because people simply do not want to have to think about things. Possibly the biggest hindrance to any form of good journalism is the desire to make money. As you’ve seen, all the newspapers that end up making money in South Africa - the more they destroy their content, the more money they make.

TG: Why is that so?

SDW: I wish I knew. I wish I had an explanation of why that works, apart from the most pessimistic views of human nature. It may be just because people want to be spoon-fed rubbish. I don’t know, I have no idea. I hope that isn’t true. Obviously newspapers are a commercial enterprise and you’ve got to find some way of surviving. But I think if your overriding criteria for what you’re doing is to make money then you’re not going to produce good work because you’re just going to do whatever it takes to make good money. It’s McDonalds, you know. That’s all it is, its all about producing the goods as cheaply as possible and selling as many of them as you can. You know, which I mean to me is just, you know, is just turning people into mindless consumers, and again you know, we’re back to the hamburger approach to culture.

TG: Do you think arts journalism is important?

SdW: Yes I do. For all of the aforementioned reasons, for all of those reasons, because the arts are, I think, one of the deepest and most complicated ways in which humanity reflects upon itself. The business of criticism is part of that process of reflection. The more we can help people understand how the arts do what they do, the more it can allow people access into that whole realm, [in] which we become conscious, feeling, intelligent human beings, able to reflect upon ourselves, able to look at our urges, our needs, our desires, and not just be cogs in some vast machine.

TG: What is the relation between the arts and entertainment and art journalism and entertainment?

SdW: The arts always have to entertain in some form or another. Again it’s the principle of making money, if an art form aims only to entertain, its likely to be fairly simple. If it aims to entertain in an educated way, and it aims to entertain by showing things you haven’t seen before, by frightening you a little bit, by challenging taboos, by coming at things from a new angle, by dealing with complex issues within a society, then I think it entertains in a

meaningful way. The arts need to entertain, but if they overly entertain then that's all they are. They're popcorn.

TG: What is the difference between arts journalism and other genres like news, for example?

SdW: Well, I find it difficult to answer that question, because I have not really worked as a news journalist and it's not something that I was ever really capable of doing because I could never really believe in objectivity anyway, it didn't really make sense to me. I can't see that anyone is objective. I think obviously as a journalist, as a news-writer you can be fair, and that your obligation is to be fair and to present as many sides of a story as you can. In that respect I think that have the same obligation as an arts journalist. To be fair is to judge things on their own terms. You can't criticise an apple for not being a pear. But then you also have to have sufficient understanding to know the difference, and to know what the internal rules of that particular art form are, why it works the way it does, what its history is, how it functions in a society.

I have never been interested in the so-called mode of objective journalism. I don't think it's objective at all. I think it's about using what I have as a subjective individual, my knowledge, my understanding, my viewpoints, and trying to communicate that in as interesting a way as possible, to a reader. So that that the reader can engage in a dialogue with us, can bring their own knowledge, understanding, viewpoints, opinions to that process and engage with what I'm saying and thereby engage with that particular art, artwork, artefact or cultural product involved. It's all about dialogue, it's about finding ways to talk about ourselves, about society, what we're doing, uh, and we can only really do that out of our own subjectivity.

I have always felt somewhat uncomfortable in the role of someone laying down some sort of objective truth. Conveying information in an unproblematic way. That's just me, you know, I always think there is no one truth, there is no one narrative, it's all multiple, it's all complicated, it's all changing all the time, it's all in a state of flux. Meaning itself is unstable, and that I think is the principle from which we have to work.

TG: How is the use of sources in arts journalism?

SdW: In terms of arts journalism I think it's less complicated in a way than news journalism. If you've undertaken to someone that you will not reveal who they are, then you don't reveal who they are, you know. It's a simple as that. A complicated area in arts journalism is personal relationships within the critical sphere, particularly in South Africa where for instance the fine art scene is very small. People know each other. The literary scene is quite small. That can be very difficult because if one is going to sit down and write a review, hopefully you are not going to be dishonest and pretend that you like the book just because you know the person and you don't want to destroy the friendship.

The complicated thing is that I think one needs to make the distinction between the two fundamental genres of art journalism. As I said earlier, the feature kind of story where you are writing in a general way, about someone or about an event or about a particular sort of complex of idea or something, as opposed to a review which focus on a particular work or group of works. In reviews one has to be quite careful not allowing personal issues to cloud critical issues. In other words, if I know someone well I'm not going to review [his/her] book. If I hate someone I'm not going to review [his or her] book, because I think that would cloud my judgement. It would make it difficult for me, it's quite possible to sit down and say, you

know, "I detest so and so, but actually he's written quite a good book". I think you've just got to be honest, but it can be a problematic thing and you do often have the problem.

I think that as an editor of the arts section one has to be very wary of that, because people do come to arts journalism very often with personal agendas, and those personal agendas are often disguised as ideological battles. In other words they say, "oh, got to tackle so and so", "I'm really going to have to rip this book to shreds because they are conservative old farts". Well, how silly is the line between that supposed ideological issue where we are fighting the good fight, and simple dislike of a particular person? And I think it's one of the difficult parts as an editor. And having been arts editor and having been books editor I've struggled with try[ing] to avoid those kind of unpleasant confrontations. For instance reviewing a new show of conceptual art, you get a reviewer who is genuinely sympathetic to the genre of conceptual art. You tend to understand what it is about, but you haven't already decided that so and so is a shit artist. That's always a bit of a tricky business. But again, I think that if critics are good and they are admitting that what they are doing is putting forward a personal viewpoint, and they are trying to justify in as broad a way as possible - trying to, not lay down scripture, but to articulate a personal reaction in general terms, so that it becomes accessible to a range of people. Then I think that's okay.

Paradoxically, I think that in terms of writing a kind of feature around a particular people, it very often helps if there is a personal acquaintanceship. I've done a lot of interviews with writers for instance and the oddest artist and that kind of thing. And it very often helped to make a more interesting interview if I know that person, if I have seen their work before, if I am sympathetic to their work, if I understand what they're doing, if I am conscious about their background, if we know each other and get on well together. I think that helps to produce a better article, whether that is then open to the accusation of corruption in terms of the fact that you end up promoting your friends. I think that's a tricky area. It probably is a matter of spinning the roundabout, because there are many times that I have had a friend or someone that I know that has said, "oh, I've got a new book coming out, but I don't now if it would be good for an interview" and it would work well, because we know each other and because I like the book. There are other times when you know someone well and they say "let's do an interview I've got a new book coming out", you read the book and you say "well, sorry I don't like the book, what can I do?" We can have a conversation about it if you like, and see what comes out, but I have to be up-front and I have to be honest and say that I don't like the work. The problem is one of honesty and dishonesty. If you pretend you like something and you don't, or at the other extent people tend to pretend not to like something when they do.

It's not a black or white issue in the sense that it's not like you kind of say a work is either one hundred percent good or one hundred percent bad, you know. There are a lot of grey areas here and you can look at a particular work and you can say "well, it's interesting, it's valuable for the following reasons", although it's perhaps not as good as it could be for these other reasons. And that is part of what the critic needs to do, you need to be able to make these fine distinctions, and to say, "this is what's good about it and this is what's not good about it". It's not a matter of saying "well, it's good" or "it's bad".

You had this kind of a thing very often in the 80s and early 90s around young black writers who had a very poor education, who were not writing out of a complicated, high European literary background. And whose work was not going to pass muster in terms of high European literary, critical ideals. Allowances had to be made for that. If you take a broad view of the culture and you don't look at it purely in narrow terms where you are ticking off a check-list

and you're saying "ten points for vocabulary, ten points for this". If you instead say an artefact can be interesting because it's an interesting artefact, it can be interesting even if it's a shit artefact because of what it says about society. It can be interesting because of the reaction it causes. The field is wide open and I think if you're honest about your reactions, and I think if you articulate your viewpoint as clearly as possible, uh, you tend to avoid most of those kind of problems. I mean it's not really about going and saying, "Oy, these poor people have to be uplifted". You can do that kind of story and say well, here is a great story about how someone is running a jazz club in a community hall in Katlehong. Well, great, he's uplifting people, but it's not my job. I'm not a development agency, I'm not an NGO, I'm not Mother Teresa, I'm not going out to save anybody's soul.

TG: What is the difference between arts journalism and other genres in terms of readership?

SdW: I think it's more complicated in that again, I spoke earlier about factions and fragments, in that the people who read the kwaito story are not necessarily the same people who read the conceptual arts stories. These are the factions and fragments that exist in our society as it stands today. Part of the process of understanding our society and finding a way forward - I don't think it's about building a national culture or building a nation or anything like that. I think it's about finding ways to understand ourselves and whichever way you find to do it is valid. Hopefully in the context of a particular art publication like the *Friday* section of the *Mail*, like what used to be just the arts pages within the *Weekly Mail*, as long as you are reflecting the diversity of the society, as long as you are making space for all those fragments in all their diversity - You're not saying, "hey we have to put this all in a magimix and smush it all together and come out with one thing". That's not what you're doing. You're saying "we can do the kwaito, we can do the opera, we can do the ballet, we can do the conceptual art, we can do all these different things so that we are aware of all the little pockets and the fragments". And as time goes by, we will develop new understandings and these things will start to crossover and change and move and develop and that's just the way the world works. We've got to reflect it as it stands at present. And I think that, in editorial terms, is important.

TG: When were you the arts editor?

SdW: In early 89 I was the entertainment guide editor, which I carried on doing for quite some years after that. In 1990 I worked as a sub-editor on the paper in general, but also at the time of the foundation of the *Daily Mail*, became the sub-editor devoted to the art section. And I was also writing a lot of reviews at that time, I was writing a lot of theatre reviews and a lot of book reviews. In about 91 I became books editor, which was the one job I've held consistently all of these years. And I think about then, or maybe it was 92, I became deputy arts editor. And I was deputy arts editor under Don Mattera, then under Raeford Daniel, and then under Charlotte Bauer for four or five years. Then I took a break for a while, I went on to a part time basis for about six months, I think it was in 93. I was still doing the books pages and helping out with some of the design and editing, but that's all I was doing. Then I came back in late 93 to help with the integration of the *Guardian* in to the *Mail*, worked on that for about a year. 94 I was made arts editor proper for the first time. I did that for a couple of years and then Erwin Manoim who was then the co-editor and in charge of the design and layout of the paper left. I took over that job, not as co-editor, but as sort the chief designer and production editor. In 97 Philip van Niekerk came in as the new editor, I worked on a redesign of the paper, part of the redesign of the paper was launching the *Friday* section as a separate unit.

At that point Charl Blignaut was editing that section, he edited it for a while, about nine months or so, and then he moved to largely do writing and I became the arts editor again. I was arts editor then for another year or two. And then in 98 or 99 I decided that I had had enough of spending five days a week in the office and I wanted to have more time to write and I handed over the art section to Alex Dodd, who about a year after that handed it over to Matthew Krause. So what I do at present is, to edit the books pages and part of the *Friday* section. I do the movie reviews, and I help out in general with the arts pages, just in terms of conceptualising stories. Just advising on the process in terms of editing and so forth, layout, design, the whatever, I've done all these different things, so I have to give advisement. The general look of it, a general feel, general quality issues and that kind of thing.

TG: I would like you to comment on one article that you've written in relation to what we have been talking about.

SdW: Well what do I need to say about it?

TG: How would you analyse this in terms of the goals arts journalism has?

SdW: Well, I think that the purpose of this kind of article is very simple, in the sense that you have a film festival that is showing a whole lot of movies by filmmakers that a lot of people have probably never heard of. So the purpose of this kind of article is basically to introduce this guy to the readership and to say, "this is who is, this is the kind of work that he does and this are some of the views that he has". So basically there is a short introductory section, which is basically explaining who he is, the kind of films that he makes and uh, making it clear that I think that they are very interesting. And then it goes straight into question and answer, straightforward interview with him. Basically I'm just asking him about his new movie, how does it relate to his earlier films, some of the ideas that he was maybe trying to articulate in that particular movie. And just letting him basically have his say, simple question and answer format, it hasn't been sort of worked up into a whole kind of feature. Just to let him have his say and introduce him to people, hear what he thinks, hear who is, I think that's very simple.

TG: What made you choose to write about this?

SdW: I had seen some of his movies on previous film festivals, and I had thought he was a very interesting filmmaker. Very daring, very avant-garde, as a filmmaker does things some other filmmakers simply don't do. He is very engaged with gay pornography as his genre, and his movies are basically a comment on gay pornography that has been turned inside out. And I think that is a very interesting thing, because there are no other filmmakers that I know of that deal with that. Here is someone who's taken pornography, which is something that exists outside the mainstream in a sense, although I'm beginning to think perhaps it's a long view of the mainstream - he's done a lot of interesting things with the genre, in the sense that he's taken pornography that is usually simply to provide pleasure and stimulation, and he started deconstructing it in ways that make it quite disturbing and also very funny. To see movies that are sexually permissive, but that are also quite disturbing and are also quite fun, is quite a unique thing to do. I was interested in the work of his that I had seen, and I heard that he was coming to the festival. I called him up, and said I would be interested in doing an interview with him because it would be interesting to hear what he had to say about his work and some of his views and so forth. And just to find a way to basically introduce him to the public, let him have his say, explain what it is that he does. Hopefully that will make people interested in

his work, and see what interests there might be there for them. And maybe they'll go and see it and hopefully have their brains massaged. Something like that.

TG: Was it a political statement?

SdW: Well, it was a political statement of course, there's always a political statement.

TG: It seems like the *Mail&Guardian* has written quite a lot about gay politics.

SdW: Sure, absolutely, there always has been, that comes out of the perspective that we had in the 80s and the early 90s which was that "this paper is going to provide a space for viewpoints that are otherwise disdained in the society". And part of the broader agenda to me of liberation, politics in general was exactly that - until we started writing about this kind of thing, you did not see issues like gay politics in the mainstream media at all. There are issues there that I think have to be explored and have to be debated.

I'm not pretending to be an objective journalist here. I come at this from the perspective of a gay man who is interested in particular things and all I can say to people is, "look, I'm interested in this, this is my viewpoint this is what I think, you can agree, you can disagree". Inevitably it's a political agenda in terms of the fact that I think that movies challenge dominant discourses in an interesting light. And of course being me I think the challenging dominant discourses is a good thing. I'm going to help do that. And the more debate that it strikes out or the more debate that it engenders, the more discussion, the more options that it opens up for people to investigate themselves, their lives, their viewpoints, because they don't as far as I am concerned.

It's all as I say, its all the endless ongoing play of discourse and we all write from our own positions, we write a particular subject and a particular society. I am defined by who I am in terms of that particular society. I am defined by the fact that I'm white, that I'm male, that I'm gay, that I have a particular background in the arts, that I have particular interests, that I have particular concerns, that I have particular politics. And it would be dishonest of me to pretend that those don't exist, so all I have to do is be honest about them and say, "look, this is, you know, this is how I feel, this I think is interesting from my viewpoint". Let people take it from there, feel free to disagree. People must disagree, as I say, it's not scripture, it's me as one individual with one particular viewpoint and hopefully it's interesting and informative enough for people to find it valuable.

**INTERVIEW WITH MARK GEVISSER, KILLARNEY, JOHANNESBURG,
31.10.2000**

**Previously freelance journalist for the *Mail&Guardian*
Presently freelance journalist and writer**

MARK GEVISSER (MG): My name is Mark Gevisser, I finished my high-school studies in South Africa and began a bachelors degree here, but then applied to and got into Yale University in America. So, I did my undergraduate work there – which was four years. My area was comparative literature with quite a lot of history, and my senior essay – which was equivalent to a thesis - was on Black South African protest theatre and what happened to it as it moved from a township to Johannesburg to sort-of off Broadway and then to Broadway, like how it kept getting re-commodified all the time. So my academic work from the beginning was about politics and culture. I was always interested in those two together. I did quite a lot of work on black consciousness poetry as well – what tended to be my focus in comparative literature, was third world literature – specifically African and Latin American. I graduated from college and I really wanted to be a writer.

I had spent a lot of time doing creative writing and I actually had a novel I was working on. I was very interested in writing fiction. I needed a profession, and it didn't seem to me that fiction writing was a profession. I wasn't particularly interested in journalism, but I was interested in politics and specifically in South African politics. So, I got an internship at an American publication called *The Nation*, which is a sort of left wing weekly political analysis commentary. And from there I started doing a lot of freelance work as a journalist in New York, I was a theatre critic for the *Village Voice*. I did a lot of writing about South Africa – and I also did a lot of writing about AIDS and the AIDS epidemic, because that was happening at the time as well.

TERESA GROGAN (TG): When was that?

MG: It was between 87 and 90. And also about gay politics, which is another major subject of mine. For the *Village Voice* I was one of the theatre critics, and every week I reviewed between one and four plays. I spent a lot of my time going and seeing bad theatre in weird tenements on the Lower East Side. It was very much a mainstay of my professional life, but it was never the only thing I did – at all. When I was in America, I taught for a year in a high school and I enrolled in a Masters programme in creative writing, with the idea of getting back to fiction writing, creative writing etc. But I did not.

Half way through the Masters programme I decided I was going to come back to South Africa – partly because I didn't think the Masters programme was very interesting, and partly – largely - because it was 1990. Mandela had just been released, and I was a journalist and my country was free and I just – I couldn't quite justify not being at home. And also partly because I had three quarters of a novel that I needed to finish – and to finish it I needed to be home, because it was set here and I felt like I had left this place when I was eighteen and I didn't understand it and I needed to come back and explore again. And I came back short term, with the idea of just staying for a couple of months and seeing how it would work out. I came back in 1990 and I began working freelance what was then the *Daily Mail&Guardian* and it had been the *Weekly Mail*.

TG: The *Daily Mail* was for quite a short time.

MG: Very short time. I came back as it started and I began to work for them – always as a freelancer. I was never an employee. And I worked for them, and did other freelance work largely for American publications. I was, and still nominally am, the South African correspondent for *The Nation*. And I was doing writing for the *New York Times* and the *Village Voice* and some American papers, other American papers, Australian papers and for the *Daily Mail&Guardian* and then for the *Weekly Mail* – once it became the *Weekly Mail&Guardian*. I divided my time between cultural writing and political feature writing and kind of social feature writing as well. But I probably did as much cultural writing – I sort of crossed over the front and the back of the book, which is very unusual, I don't think it was often done. There are many reasons for that. The major one is that there just wasn't enough happening in the arts world here to be able to be only. My interest has always been to try and understand the society – specifically trying to understand South Africa in transition.

TG: Can you do that through arts?

MG: I am interested to do that through arts. Which isn't to say I am not interested in arts for arts sake, or that I didn't write book reviews that you know that were about – that were American books that had nothing to do with South Africa. I love things like circuses and carnivals and stuff like that, so I would I review that Russian circus when it came to town as well. But it was always about trying to understand our society and our culture, through cultural products, which doesn't mean to say that there is a belief that culture is a weapon and culture must only be used to transform society. It is a sort of culture with a small "c" argument, which is not a very developed – it is far more developed in continental European media than it is in sort of Anglo – in Britain or in the States or here – this idea that you look at culture very broadly in the arts pages of a newspaper. The way newspapers work here, is you know you've got the book reviews and you've got the theatre reviews, and you've got celebrity feature, and you've got the film reviews and you've got the TV reviews. There is very little sense in looking at trends in society through culture, and that is what I was interested in doing. And I did it for a while, while also doing more hardcore political feature writing.

TG: But in the *Mail&Guardian*?

MG: And elsewhere. I was never exclusive. I used to write for magazines. I always wrote internationally as well. I have to be honest, I really got bored of writing about culture in South Africa, formally. And for a number of reasons: one is that there just wasn't enough. There was not enough of a threshold of new cultural products to be able to keep on engaging – and this is what I wanted to do: to track the transformation. Things would come up every now and then, but on a week to week basis – like okay the idea was that I would be a theatre critic – like I was in the States. There is just not enough on a week to week basis – tragically. So, you know, maybe I would write about why there wasn't enough, and I did quite a lot of that writing. I did a very long essay for an American journal called *Theatre* about the state of theatre in South Africa. I wrote a very long piece for the *New York Times*, which also looked at why it was that - how theatre was happening why it wasn't happening.

But to be a sort of regular "Bobby on the beat" critic just wasn't possible. Partly because there wasn't enough material, and partly because the world is too small. To be in a situation

where if you said what you thought, you could actually stop a production because so few people go to the theatre anyway. Then you get involved in these fights with people and you write something and they get really upset and they won't talk to you and they wouldn't invite you to their next opening because it is an incredibly small world. There just wasn't that threshold that you would get in a place like New York where you know I can write my opinion and somebody else can write their opinion and everyone – I just felt like it doesn't work with that sort of criticism here. But still if there were interesting movies or books or anything like that, that I felt were part of my broader project of society in transition, I would go for it. And I did that until about 1995, when I just started doing a full time political profile column for the *Mail&Guardian*. And because it was full time, there just wasn't time to do anything else. So, I stopped doing arts and culture writing from 1995.

TG: You talk about these portrait interviews you did.

MG: Ja, which has been selected in a book. Because of my interest in culture a lot of them are about cultural figures. There is Hugh Masekela, Brenda Fassie – always not looking at them in a pure cultural way. Trying to figure what they are trying to say about our society. So I did that from about 1995 till about 1997. And I then left the *Mail&Guardian* and made a movie called *The man who drove with Mandela*, which is a film, part documentary, part fiction, about the gay man who was with Mandela when Mandela was arrested. Mandela was pretending to be his chauffeur – his driver...

TG: Is this true or –

MG: Ja, it's totally true, totally true. And he is a fascinating character, he was a theatre producer, so I was also very interested in him because this is a man – I felt he was a bit like me. I could try and work out my own identity through him. He was a communist, he was Johannesburg's top theatre producer, and he was also a gay man. And he had all these identities that he needed to – cultural, political, social/sexual – identities that he needed to juggle. But he kept them all very separate because this was the 1920s – pre-feminism, pre 'the personal is the political', so with theatre people he just did theatre, with his communist people he just did communism, with his gay people – you know what I mean it was that kind of packaging. And I was very interested in how my life is different. How it all leads into each other for me. So I did that and about two years ago I got a commission to write a series of biographical essays about Thabo Mbeki, I wrote and published, and which I am now writing a book length biography about him on the basis on those.

TG: So through these years you have had different jobs, but not -

MG: I've never had a job! I've had different contracts with different responsibilities, ja –

TG: And you also write – I saw your column yesterday in the *Sunday Times*.

MG: Ja, that's occasional though. I've got an arrangement with the *Sunday Times* because they are co-publishing this Mbeki book. My arrangement with the *Sunday Times* is that if I want to publish anything I go to them first as a freelance.

TG: So who else is publishing the Mbeki book?

MG: Jonathan Ball, which is publisher here – and hopefully we will get. We don't yet have the publisher's approval, but we're are doing the shopping now, or they are doing the shopping now. I also edited a book called *Defined Desire: Gay and Lesbian lives in South Africa*, which is a collection of essays about gay and lesbian identities in South Africa, which came out in 1994. And I wrote the major historical essay that begins it, which was another large project which I did which took me away from weekly journalism for a while– I took a break for eight months to a year.

TG: How would you define arts journalism?

MG: You mean as I would like it to be, or as it is?

TG: Both.

MG: I think as it is, is what I have already said to you, it is very compartmentalised. It is very much about the discipline and about the particular sector and it is very – it tends to be critical – but not necessarily in the right way of the meaning of the word critical. It is a guide. Arts journalism is a weekend guide. You read it to see what concerts you should go to, what movies you should go to that's the function of –

TG: Are you talking about South African arts journalism?

MG: Ja. But I think – in America as well – but let's say I am always talking about South Africa, unless I refer back to America. But that's definitely what arts journalism is here: It is your weekly guide and your daily guide to TV blah blah blah...

TG: But do you think this has changed a little bit as well?

MG: No.

TG: It hasn't – it has been the same thing since the 80s?

MG: In fact I think it was probably freer in the 80s because there was more – in the alternative press – I think it depends what you mean by the word "free". On one level it was much freer in the 80s and early 90s because the society was so much more politicised, and there was so much more of an understanding that you had to look at things in a context and you had to see what they mean. We were trying to figure out what the society was about, so in one way it was freer then. In one way it's freer now because you don't have to worry about that anymore.

TG: What I meant was that if it's more of a guide, than it was in the 80s? Because of the quite politicised –

MG: - environment –

TG: Ja, in the arts journalism as well in the *Mail&Guardian* or the *Weekly Mail* in the 80s, while it's not anymore, and it seems as there is a shift towards...

MG: It is more of a guide now. It is more of a guide now. But I think it has always been too much of a guide. And it's not that I don't think that it should be a guide. I think that that's the

basis of arts journalism and one has to accept that and work with that. And it's very important and there is nothing as great as having a good critic who you follow and you say "I am going to see this movie because that critic told me to". "I trust that critic", or "I'm really interested in a tape that this person has on that art exhibition". You know, but generally it's about a sort of "thumbs up, thumbs down". Go and see it, don't go and see it, rather than "what does it mean?"

What I always tried and do in my arts journalism was to understand what it meant in terms of our society. So, there was always a kind of theoretical issue I was working on – not always, I mean when I went to the circus there wasn't necessarily, I was just having fun. But certainly, if I was reviewing *Sarafina*, or the latest Athol Fugard play, I would try and answer big questions, and there is not enough of that – at all. There is not enough writers who do that there is not enough space in the media given to that sort of writing, and there is not enough readers in South Africa interested in that. And that is another reason why I stopped doing arts journalism. I didn't want to be this kind of "thumbs up, thumbs down" critic.

TG: What do you find is the difference between arts journalism and other types of journalism, let's say news or feature writing in terms of subjectivity/objectivity, use of sources, and language and readership?

MG: Well, the subjectivity/objectivity thing is very interesting, one of reasons perhaps that I was more attracted to arts journalism from the start is because there's room for a subjective voice and you can play with that and work with that. You can do really exciting things like talk about your experiences as you went through a play or a movie or a festival or whatever – or looking at other people's experiences.

And my favourite thing to write about, which often wouldn't go on the arts pages, but which I would see as arts journalism, would be like Mandela's inauguration in 1994, or the sort of big national cultural events, where everyone gathers. I remember it very strongly, it wasn't a profound piece, but it was about this jazz on the lake, stuff that happened in Zoo Lake. Basically the Zoo Lake was one of the most exciting things in the early 90s, that there were these huge concerts in the Zoo Lake that black people and white people came to together. And I would write about those, and I was writing about the audience more than I was writing about – I didn't even notice the acts, I wasn't even really listening, I was writing about the people there. Or I was writing about stuff happening at the state theatre and I would look at the audience and how the audience was responding, which is exactly what I was doing in my academic work. My earlier work was all about audience response how an audience changes a product. That was the sort of theoretical basis I was coming from. How context changes a product.

TG: The meeting of the two, making the final product.

MG: Of course, which is another way of saying the same thing. I would write this sort of stuff, and interestingly enough, I would write it the way you would write a sort of review, with subjectivity, with analysis, with some ideas and it would go on to the news pages. So that cross over was happening that way as well. The *Mail&Guardian* has always been quite free with voice, where you put yourself in it, so I don't think the boundaries there are as strong as in other newspaper where there is the news section and the feature section and there is the analysis section, the arts and sports, it always was with the *Mail&Guardian*, which is why I felt at home there. It would be very difficult if I was writing for *The Star* or the *Sunday*

Times to have written those pieces that I am talking about, because where would they didn't have the right box for them.

TG: [About closeness to sources] In the arts for example, what is your motivation between choosing to write about this event, rather than this event?

MG: You mean are you open to write about your friends? Ja, you know the alternative artistic culture, and the alternative political culture in the late 80s and early 90s in this country were both cliques, so whether you're writing about arts or whether you're writing about politics you are writing about people. If you are the kind of advocacy journalist who works at the *Mail&Guardian* – or even if you are not – this is true for my colleagues who are at *The Star* or the *Sunday Times*, you get very involved with the people you are writing about. And you get very involved with the people you are writing about anyway, but because this is a very small society and there is so much at stake and because journalists tend, tended to be activists and cultural producers as well into the 90s there is a lot of cross over. And I actually, it's funny, I have incredibly strong feelings about not, like I won't write about friends, and I'm quite real about that and I will take myself off something if I feel like I am compromised in some way. But I don't think there is a culture of that in South Africa, at all.

TG: There is not a culture of writing about friends.

MG: There is not a culture of not writing about friends. Writing about friends is short hand for having your own agenda, I think.

TG: Yes.

MG: I've always had an agenda, and what I try and do is let the reader know what my agenda is. My philosophy about being a journalist, is that I am going to take you through this cultural event and I am going to be your ears and eyes there, because you weren't there – so I use subjectivity. Whether I use the "I" or not, I'm there and you trust me, I am your agent, I am the person who is doing it for you, but if you are going to trust me you have to know where I am coming from. So I'm going to tell you that I am like a white "lefty" da da da da whatever. You need to make that very clear. I'm not claiming to be omniscient and I'm not claiming to be objective and that has always been my approach to journalism and that is really the only way I can write. If I wasn't able to write like that I wouldn't be a journalist.

TG: We already talked about this as well, language also. It goes into the subjectivity of the ...

MG: I think that one of the things that has happened in South African media, possibly to South African media's detriment, is because of the high politicisation, and because of the cross over between activist and journalist as well, particularly in publications like the *Mail&Guardian* the kind of distance... there was so much at stake that it was really difficult to write kind of cool, distant, the *New York Times* style of reporting – and journalists weren't really trained in that. And when you look now, I think the state of South African media is appalling. It is really bad. And I think that is one of the legacies, is that I don't think there has been enough training in how to kind of put your heart away and just listen... just listen to what people say, be open to what people say, listen to what happened, come back and try and record.

TG: Do you think it has to do also with the history and what you have been talking about the cross over between activist and journalist?

MG: It has to do with there being so much at stake. Whether you were me at the *Mail&Guardian* if you're Max Du Pre on the *Vrye Weekblad*, and you really should speak to one of those alternative Afrikaans journalists. I think it is really important to speak to an Afrikaner. Someone who comes from a tradition where they were rebelling against where they came from, if you can. They had their own battles they were fighting, or alternatively, Afrikaans journalists who worked on the government newspapers. They weren't just journalists, they were defenders of "civilisation". And likewise the standard English speaking journalists who worked on *The Star* or the *Sunday Times* weren't just journalists they were defenders of the liberal tradition. I think there are many reasons why journalism in this country is in very bad shape and that is one of them that there is not a tradition of a free press, really. And by free I mean – I did not call the *Mail&Guardian* a free press. It was certainly not by the time I left in 1995.

TG: You don't call it that today either?

MG: I don't know. But when I was there it wasn't. It had an agenda. I mean, the standard definition of a free press is a press that can say what it likes and I suppose I am complicating that notion a bit. I am saying a free press is a press that...if you are a newspaper and you're fighting a struggle, whether you're fighting something or defending something, and that's your reason for existence, you're not a free press. I'm, I'm playing with words okay. I mean there is obviously a different meaning of "free press" which I accept. That is where we all come from. I think to our detriment. Whilst we're on language - there's not the kind of cool quasi-objective language, that is the benchmark of reporting in the West. It doesn't really exist here. For better or for worse. Sometimes it's for the better, sometimes it is for the worse.

TG: I've been asking you about journalism in relation to other types of journalism, but you have been talking now more general about language sources and so on. So, it's about the same would you say?

MG: The *Mail&Guardian*'s alternativeness was about breaking boundaries so it was willing to do it in terms of discourse as well. The kind of headlines you would see on the front - *Mail&Guardian* is a tabloid, so it lends itself to the kind of screaming tabloid headline. And there would be incredibly...there was one which showed... there was a time when the minister of defence denied Inkatha gate, he denied that whole thing, the minister of the police.

TG: Is that the nose page?

MG: - and to put that on. Sometimes it go really stupid – once where the government said something really stupid and the headline was "Hoo Ha Hooey" which basically means "bullshit". That was the headline, "Hoo Ha Hooey", so there's a kind of playfulness with form. The one that I got really angry with the paper and actually wrote a letter to the paper disassociating myself. It was the first match that the South Africans played internationally in rugby against Australia, and we beat Australia...and the cartoonist Derek Bauer did a very graphic cartoon of a Springbok raping a Kangaroo. Like "yeah" that kind of rough macho thing. And this was put on the cover of a serious weekly newspaper, because there was that kind of playfulness. And I thought it was appalling, I think it said everything wrong and

disgusting about chauvinism and all the reasons why South Africa has been like left out of the world for so long. There were those sort of things that were sort of emblematic of the way the boundaries were.

TG: This “playfulness” that you are talking about, about crossing the boundaries. Do you find it in general good, or except for these publications you’re talking about the “playfulness” or do you –

MG: No, I think that the thing about it is that you take chances, and sometimes it fails terribly. In the 1980s and early 1990s the kind of sensationalist screaming headlines, and the approach that the *Mail&Guardian* took, was totally appropriate, because of the battle that was being fought. And those I think are the kind of headlines that you have to have on a tabloid. Tabloids lend themselves to those sorts of headlines. They often promise more than that can be delivered. It is just something about the way it has to look on the page, and now I don’t think it is appropriate anymore, that approach to news, that the *Mail&Guardian* still has, and that’s why I think that the *Mail&Guardian* has kind of lost it’s heart. It has lost something very important that it used to have. But I don’t think that answers your question. I’m a great believer in needing to have discipline before you can break it, so like I write across the art forms. But I know what I know and I know what I don’t know, and if I’m going to write about arts, or I’m going to write about dance – It’s not that I won’t write about them, but I will really do my research and I will try and let my reader know that my background is actually somewhere else, and I don’t think that there is enough of that here. I don’t think that there are enough people who, who are really grounded in their discipline.

I think it’s a great pity that the *Mail&Guardian* doesn’t have a theatre critic or a performance critic, because I think a theatre critic doesn’t really exist in South Africa. Somebody who really knows and understands performance, who’s read the books, who’s travelled, who’s seen Robert Wilson, who knows the history of performance in South African tradition and ditto with music, and there aren’t writers like that. You start from a base, so my base would be literature and performance, and then I’ll move out to film, but I’ll start from what I know, and or I think I should maybe. I don’t know whether my own career puts that theory into practice because I tend to go all over the place. I don’t like the boundaries. But it’s about knowing... if you don’t know what you are writing about, you find out.

TG: What would you say is good and what is bad arts journalism?

MG: Bad arts journalism the “thumbs up thumbs down” – Barry Ronge, who is the *Sunday Times* arts critic. Barry Ronge is a very facile writer, he is incredibly popular, people all over this country, if Barry likes a movie they go and see it. Barry wrote a totally glowing review of my film – the film I made *The man who drove with Mandela* – he loved it. Which is great. It did wonderfully it became this big thing because Barry said he loved it. What he doesn’t do is he doesn’t put it into context, in the way that we have been speaking about. The notion that an audience or a society helps make a cultural product is I think absolutely critical to arts journalism.

Perhaps a very good example of how this works is one of the favourite things I’ve ever written. This is an example of what I think is good arts journalism, the kind of journalism that I think I’ve done that I am proud of. Mira Nair is this Indian woman who made this movie called *Mississippi Masala* which is about a group of Asians who are chucked out of Uganda by Idi Amin in 1975, when they were all chucked out. And they eventually land up in the

deep South and one of them has an affair with Denzel Washington and lives happily ever after. It's got weirdly two parts of the movie. It's a very traumatic first part and then this very light frothy romantic second part. And there are these incredibly disturbing scenes of this Asian family being chucked out of their home by Idi Amin and the Ugandans. And all the sort of rhetoric of 'Africa for the Africans only' and 'get rid of the parasites, you leaches, go back to India', and I sat and I watched this in Kenya, which also has a large Asian population, in 1991. It was me and a couple of other Asian people and the rest of the audience was black African. And I watched as the audience got on it's feet and cheered every single time there was this sort of Africa for the Africans rhetoric, totally missing the point of the movie. They wanted to see that and that's what they saw and it was devastating! It happened to be on Passover, and I'm Jewish. So, I suddenly had this whole identity thing about myself, so I went desperately looking around for a synagogue where I could pray, and of course I couldn't find one, so I wrote about that. I wrote about where I'd seen the movie, and what the movie meant and what it raised for me about being a minority.

TG: What goals do arts journalists have?

MG: I think that's a very important question, because one of the goals it has to have is to promote the arts. If there aren't advocates for the arts in a society like South Africa, the arts is a kind of formal cultural discipline – so there has to be a goal and I think that causes a lot of problems for arts journalism in this country. And for me too, which I think is one of the reasons that I stopped doing it. The primary goal is to promote art – “the arts” as a discipline. A secondary goal, which is connected to the first one, is to promote products and provide a service to readers, a reliable service to readers. I'm not interested in that. The third one is, that I am interested in, to use the arts to understand our society, to use cultural production as a way of understanding our society. Because I'm interested in that doesn't mean I don't believe the first two shouldn't also exist. But it's not what I am interested in.

TG: How would that be related to “arts for arts sake”, if you say you want to look at the arts – or society through the arts?

MG: You see I don't think there is ever “arts for arts sake”. But that doesn't mean, I believe that you can't go and watch *Mission Impossible* and... The Bolshoi Ballet was just here. Now, there will be a debate, is the Bolshoi Ballet just “arts for arts sake” or what does it say about our society? Now, I went to the Bolshoi Ballet which was on at the State Theatre and I really loved it, because they're incredible and when ballet is well done it's absolutely beautiful. But ballet is not “arts for arts sake”. To think of ballet as “art for arts sake” or some kind of euro-centric notion of art that is just about pleasing aesthetic pleasures is bullshit, it's crap. I mean ballet comes out of very specific socio-cultural contexts. It played a very specific role in court politics and in elite politics in Russia and France; and so it has politics built into it. It doesn't mean that *Giselle* is an analogy for revolution; but in the way it existed then it had a specific context and in the way it exists now it has a specific context.

I went to the State Theatre, it's the year 2000, we've been a democracy for six years and there were four black people there. There was a sense among the Afrikaners who were there that – because the State Theatre used to be terribly well patronised, it had operas and ballets and all the sort of white Western art forms all the time. Pretoria was a very cultural city because the State Theatre was there. Now the State Theatre has been closed down because it was hopelessly mismanaged and because there were budget problems as well with putting money into...And there was a sense that these people had their culture back for one night! And there

was a sense that they owned it! And so where is “arts for arts sake”? Now if I was a culture writer now that’s what I would have written about. I mean, sure if I knew about ballet and I was a ballet critic too, I might have spoken about the kind of, you know the pas de deux that that one did or about you know how *Giselle* has become quite dated and I wish the Bolshoi put some more modern energetic things. You have that and then you have to have the context, because I didn’t go and see the Bolshoi in Moscow, I went to the State Theatre in Johannesburg so there is no such thing as “arts for arts sake”. It doesn’t exist.

TG: Okay. I think you have answered this as well. What are the hindrances to arts journalism?

MG: Well, I think one of the main hindrances is there is not enough good arts. I think that’s a major hindrance, I’m serious because I saw how –

TG: But why is there not enough good art?

MG: But that’s a whole question about resources in the society. I mean we can go there if you want to, but I mean that’s a huge discussion, as to why theatre has died in South Africa about why Athol Fugard can’t write a play anymore, given the theatrical tradition we have. If you don’t have good arts you’re not going to have good arts journalism and if you don’t have good journalism you’re not going to have good arts. So it becomes a viscous circle. There is one serious dance critic in this country her name is Adrienne Sichel. She is the dance critic for the *Star Tonight* – she is dogged and devoted and she goes to every single little two bit thing that happens and she gets a lot of space in the *Star Tonight* and she always writes about it and dance gets incredibly good coverage. As a result there is this perception, they get relatively good audiences, that dance is booming in this society. It’s not, it’s bullshit.

The reason why is that there is only one critic and she likes everything she sees, because she is so desperate to get people into the houses, because she believes in dance so much that she loses her critical perspective – even though she is amazing. Now if she had two or three other critics to work with we could really...I mean because...just for example there is a woman called Robyn Orlin who is one of South Africa’s most famous innovative new performance artist/dancer, she’s done tours in Europe, she is considered to be very hip, very hot. And every time she appears it’s like Adrienne Sichel writes this paean to her. She is a very talented woman, but she is doing shit because she is lazy.

The first hindrance to good arts journalism is that there aren’t good arts. Or there is not enough artistic production and by good I don’t mean “good” I mean creative, I mean challenging. That’s the one hindrance, the other hindrance is that there are not adventurous enough arts critics. The arts critics tend to be very tied to their discipline and very tied to their understanding of what is arts and how arts is made. So you won’t find a film critic – with the exception of Adrienne Sichel who is one of a kind – you won’t find a theatre critic going and spending time at township theatre projects. There was this big scandal about *Sarafina II*, I’m sure you’ve seen the coverage about that, the government gave money to Mbongeni Ngema, who made *Sarafina*, to do *Sarafina II* and make it an AIDS play. There was all this writing, again it brought down the government, it was a huge big deal, it was the first major scandal – it was in 1997 – it was the first major scandal of the new ANC government – and there was all this writing, a lot of which I did as well. No one actually went and looked – I did – but I don’t know too many people who actually went and looked at *Sarafina II* and saw what was happening to theatre.

In the New South Africa there is all this emphasis on reconstruction and development, the only way you can get arts funding is if it's got a message. So it's changed the nature of arts production here, and no one is actually going and looking and seeing how this is changing, so the people aren't for it here, aren't looking for what constitutes art. I think that's another reason why there isn't good arts journalism. Another very important reason is there aren't people who are trained. There's two generations of arts writers in this countries and very few in between. The one generation is kind of the old school, they know their ballet or they know their theatre, and they've got a very limited way of looking at the world, so they wouldn't be able to do the kind of stuff I am talking about. Then there is the younger generation who is training in politics and sociology, but they don't really know about theatre. They didn't go to university and study the history of theatre, or the history of music, or the history of film, or the history of art. So, they are writing out of no where. I think there is a gap between those two, and there are very few, I mean there are very few talented, trained black writers, who want to make a career in arts journalism.

[...]

TG: I have copies of a couple of your art critiques here and I would like you to talk about them in relation to what you have been saying of what constitutes good arts journalism.

MG: This is a review of *The Island*. I think this is exactly what I was talking about. *The Island* is a kind of a set piece of the Robben Island years. It's about captivity and the reason why it was so powerful when it came out was because it was about captivity. And whether it played here or overseas it was about Mandela – because Mandela was the one on the Island – and it was about being in chains, and I suppose what I was interested in doing here, how does this read now that Mandela is out of jail and that to me is the only possible way you could look at *The Island*. There is no other way you could write about – this is clearly a review – this isn't a think piece, this is a review. I also used it to [analyse] the state of South African theatre, the fact that we go back. Why aren't we making new plays, I mean if you look at these two together, here is his new play *Valley Song*. Why can't he [Athol Fugard] make a play like *The Island* set in post-apartheid South Africa, why when he comes to writing about post-apartheid South Africa does he get all soppy, get all sentimental, does he loose his edge, his ability to look at society which was so powerful during the apartheid years? I think that's what I say about this one.

[New article] Basically what I was trying to do here was, I was saying that Athol Fugard was having a creative crisis, and I was trying to understand how his creative crisis might be to a broader creative crisis in South Africa that was happening around then. But once more it is a review. And I think you'll find that here I do that kind of “thumbs up thumbs down” stuff, like I said here “I can scarcely recall a more moving performance than Ntshona's why don't we see more of him on our stage” – that's a theatre critic talking.

TG: This one is a bit “thumbs down” and this one is a bit up.

MG: Ja sure. I made this about Fugard rather than about the play: “Beneath all of this is a terrible sadness to *Valley Song* it is a sadness about an ageing man's longing of Fugard's longing for the simplicity of vegetables and youth of prose”. There is less in this one of the kind of standard theatre critic stuff, because I really didn't like it, but I didn't want to say it

out right. If I were to do the sort of score card this would have probably scored really low, so I probably kind of edged away from doing that sort of thing.

TG: And why did you do that?

MG: Because of the stuff we were talking about earlier about because art is so vulnerable in this society, that you are scared that if you do that sort of thing, if I trashed – really trashed *Valley Song* that it is going to be a blow against theatre in this country, which is one of the reasons why I stopped doing it. I just felt like I wanted to find a way... look, if it was really terrible – morally offensive and aesthetically offensive – I would have said so.

TG: So if it's just bad you won't?

MG: In New York I had a very different approach to it – a very, very different approach to it; but in South Africa I felt particularly when reviewing theatre - and you know there were times, a very controversial review I wrote was of a movie called *Friends*, which was a South African movie. The first sort of post-apartheid South African movie or 90s South African movie, that tried to deal with the reality of a post-apartheid South Africa. It was made by a South African woman who spent years raising the money, and I really thought it was terrible. And I panned it, I was very harsh about it and it had huge repercussions for me. Personally and professionally.

TG: When I started writing, I was quite young, in like a regional paper. It sounds quite familiar those things that you shouldn't hammer anything... you should protect the people...

MG: What was said to me was it was so important that this film was made. If we are going to like trash all our products how are we ever going to get an industry together?

TG: And that's quite true as well isn't it?

MG: It is and it isn't. I mean I feel very conflicted about it. It's partly true but I also believe that what I said is that there is a creative energy, there is optimally a creative energy that exists between critics and producers, between arts journalists and arts producers, and the one feeds the other. The better the arts criticism the better the arts and the better the arts the better the arts criticism. So now good arts criticism means calling something when it's bad. It has to. Let's not say bad, when it doesn't work. Then maybe you say "it doesn't work for me. This is why it didn't work for me, maybe go and look for yourself". But I didn't want to do that here. I didn't want to do that here.

TG: Do you agree that there is kind of politics in that as well. Choosing not to say so if it is very bad, because we have to uplift the South African culture because there is not much of it.

MG: And I think that is a major reason why I stopped being a critic, because I don't like that way of working.

[...]

MG: Every year there is a student art [competition] at Wits University. And I was asked to be one of the judges. And these are like the best and brightest young artist in our country, the students. And looking at the work, one of the things that interested me was just how

globalised their conceptions were. How this work could have been made anywhere, by Norwegian students, by American students, by Australian students. There was something that was part of global village. They got an international young person's consciousness rather than a South African consciousness. There is something that I felt.

And I felt it very strongly is that the most successful work was the work that was rooted in South African consciousness. Even the woman who won, even she was using photographs and mirrors in a way that is very hip at the moment in the international art world. It is very, very hip. In a very oblique way talking about her own experiences in South Africa. But when I say South Africa it wasn't like culture as a weapon that is going to hit you on the head. She was clearly proud of who she was, where she came from. And then there was some other work where the artists were clearly grounded in their world. Even if the work could have been anywhere, or even if what they were grounded in was their gender identity or their racial identity, there was this sense of them coming from somewhere. They weren't just logging on to an international culture that made their work very good. And not just because it talked about context, but because it was resolved, it had a connection to it.

I suppose we are talking about our critics here. As an art critic, if I was writing a critique of that exhibition for the *Mail&Guardian* I would say how interesting that most of this work is totally global in its themes, it is very non-specific to South Africa, or even to like gender, or even to race. It's about some international virtual consciousness in the way it deals with things. How interesting. How great that our young artists can be liberated in a way that my generation wasn't. But also how sad that they are losing what I think is an important, or an 'identity' part of it, which is what I think is at the core of every cultural production. So, that is how I would write the review. Even though there is nothing, even vaguely, political about that exhibition.

TG: Well, we've been talking about politics and art. I would just like to ask you what is the relation between entertainment and the arts?

MG: As I said, arts journalism would not exist if it didn't function as a guide and a place where adverts are placed. I've seen this very clearly at the *Village Voice* and at the *Mail&Guardian* which are two alternative publications. The only reason why there are pages for arts journalism is because there are advertisements. And the fewer advertisements, the fewer pages there are for arts journalism. One of the reasons why the *Sunday Times* is South Africa's most successful, largest newspaper, one of the reasons why the *Sunday Times* does not have an arts section, it has a page with Barry Ronge's movie criticism is because their market research shows them that *Sunday Times* readers do not use the *Sunday Times* as a guide for the arts. And because it comes out on a Sunday, the arts world doesn't advertise in it, because nobody will advertise on the arts pages. So, you have to acknowledge that first and foremost arts pages are the standard guides. Anywhere in the world, and they bring revenue in because the movie houses put their adds in, the theatre houses put their adds in etc. I don't want to be the one to provide it, but I certainly want to be the one to receive it. And it bothers me that there isn't a reliable guide for me in South Africa. And I love it when I go overseas and there is one. It is such a treat to be able to sort of open the *Time Out* in New York or in London and go and see a movie just because they put four stars next to it.

TG: And you believe it.

MG: No, you can trust it. Even if you didn't like it, you know there are some quality to it. I think it is really important.

TG: So, for these two reviews. Who is the audience?

MG: The *Mail&Guardian* reader, who is a political reader, she or he reads the *Mail&Guardian* because they're interested in struggle and they're interested in the society, otherwise they wouldn't read the *Mail&Guardian*. So my assumption is they are kind of open to the sort of analysis that I were trying to do. They are not necessarily theatre-goers. I'd like to think that people who don't go the theatre, or are not interested in the theatre, will read this because it will tell them something about the world. So it's not just a theatre guide. Or it is not just, "oh shit, I've got to see this one". And in fact, I don't know, would you, if you read these reviews, if you were a Norwegian tourist here in 1995, and you read these reviews, would you be able to use them as guides, independent guides, as to whether you should go or not?

TG: Yes.

MG: You would. And would you go and see this one?

TG: I doubt it.

MG: That you would go and see this one? So, you see, that's interesting. They do work as guides.

TG: I think I might... would like to see this, actually because of what you are writing, about, what he [the playwright Athol Fugard] has been.

MG: It's not a good advertisement to go and see the play.

TG: Not really, no. But it does evoke some kind of interest though. It did for me when I read it.

MG: See, I suppose that was what I was trying to do. I would have liked people to be able, and that is really the real answer why I didn't trash this. It is not because I was trying to protect, it was because I would like people to be able to go... I don't want to put people off going to see it, because I think it is worth seeing. If I thought it was not worth seeing, I would probably find a way of saying it. I clearly think this is worth seeing, because if you're interested, have any interest in what is happening in the society, if you have any interest in South African theatre, you know about Fugard, and you want to know what's happened to him. And what's he doing now, so go and see it. It's interesting. Even bad theatre, even bad art is interesting, I think that's an important motto for arts journalism, but it is one that clashes with the entertainment guide motto. If you take the approach that even boring art or bad art is interesting, you are not acting as a guide anymore, you're not acting as a "go and see this, go and see that". That's happened to me, it's happened to my family, like I would review something, and my mother would go and see it. And she would come back and she would say: "That was absolutely awful, why did you tell me to go and see it?" And I would say: "I didn't tell you to go and see it, I just said it was interesting". She said: "But that is like telling me to go, if you say something is interesting, that means I should go and see it". And it was absolutely lethal. And you know, because my parents tend to go to the movies or to the theatre for entertainment, not necessarily to be challenged.

TG: But that is something also about being honest about who you are, where you are, where you're standing and why you think this could be interesting even though you don't think it is really good...

MG: Yeah. Sure.

**INTERVIEW WITH MATTHEW KROUSE, THE MEDIA MILL, JOHANNESBURG,
2.11. 2000**

Presently the arts editor of the *Mail&Guardian*

MATTHEW KROUSE (MK): I am from the East Rand, which is the industrial towns to the east of Johannesburg. I studied theatre and African literature at Wits after school. After that I started working in alternative theatre companies. I helped establish some of them when I was very young. This is because as a young performer it is sometimes really hard to find work. So you make your own. I got involved in so-called avant-garde performance, because of the time and the fashion of the time anti-apartheid performance.

TERESA GROGAN (TG): When was this?

MK: This was in the early 1980s. I [wrote] plays and [made] a movie called *Shot Down*. I started getting banned a lot by the government and eventually my hands were tied. I could do very little with the theatre. I didn't want to be a mainstream actor. I was making rumbles in the news, which was partly good for me, a good reputation in those days. It was better to be anti the system, than to be living within it. And I was a naughty boy, and then I got caught, the police took me away and all that sort of stuff. I made some short films that are very well remembered now.

But I've stopped production in culture. I learned that because of the problems I was experiencing with the censorship working for the Congress of South African Writers, the acronym is COSAW. And the patron was Nadine Gordimer, I was an office worker, Mzwakhe Mbuli, who is now in jail for robbing banks, was the vice president as well as the ambassador to Mozambique was involved in the publishing scene in the mid- late 80s. I was editing poetry, contributing to this alternative publishing house. But it's largely been discredited now, I think, not for the work it did in the 1980s, but because it's role is now controversial. Also there was some funding scandals, I'm pleased to say I was never involved in them, I never made money out of it. But there were issues around the expenditure of money. I think that the organisation was channelling some funds to the ANC and Communist Party at the time - that was the way things happened in the 1980s. From there I got involved in book publishing and went to work for Wits University Press where as you say you've met Pat Schwartz. From there I started to freelance, and I ended up at the Market Theatre, where I had done a lot of work.

I'd done a lot of work in the [Market] theatre over the years, because theatre is my background, so I'd worked there. I knew the late art director Barney Simon who is very well known internationally. I landed up becoming the senior publicist for the theatre. You know, that is a very stimulating environment. And then the position became available at the *Mail&Guardian* for the deputy arts editor under Alex Dodd. I became the deputy arts editor. Over the years I've written consistently. Since the 1980s, I've appeared constantly in this newspaper, so I'm very familiar with it.

TG: When did you first write for the *Weekly Mail*?

MK: I suppose it must have been in the early 90s, at some stage, 92, 93... I was the deputy arts editor three years ago. I've been the arts editor for just over a year. So that's really my background.

TG: How would you define arts journalism?

MK: How would I define arts journalism? Somebody who is cleverer than me, another arts editor for another newspaper, who is older and has a lot of experience - His name is Robert Greig. He works for the Independent Group, for the *Sunday Independent*. There is a book about apartheid and the cinema - in fact it is Keyan Tomaselli [who wrote it]. In it, Robert Greig is talking about art reviewers primarily, he says it is consumer advice. I very much identify with that, because, you know, being in the position I am in now, I have to keep asking my self: "What is it that I am doing? Are we making people's careers, are we making cryptic vast statements about the state of art. What is it that we are really doing?"

At the end of the day, I think if you keep on the low level as opposed to reaching for the stars. If you keep on saying that the reader is a consumer and art is a product that gets bought, not just buying the buying of art as a big picture on the wall. Whether it is CDs, any form of production, fine art or just the purchasing of theatre tickets, people spending their hard earned money on trying to understand the world around them and we have to keep on leading people to what we believe is good and being honest about what we believe is bad. If you do that, then you also don't fall into the trap of being bought by the institutions that would have you have good opinions of them. So, we are consumer-advisers on a level. We are also an entertainer in our own right. Every week we make a little drama of the art world that we see around us. If you look at it from that perspective that our duty is to entertain our readers, then we don't fall in the trap of being too serious. As far as lofty purposes go, I think that we could say that we are there to point people towards excellence. That would go with our admission to be a consumer-adviser.

TG: What do you mean by...

MK: The excellence in the disciplines of cultural production.

TG: Does that mean that you want to be an adviser to the cultural producer as well?

MK: I think that we don't really have a choice. I think that a lot of cultural producers look down on us. They have a lot of disdain because we define things and sometimes it's not the way every single person who is involved in cultural production would like to be defined. They would like to define themselves in their own way, and they like to see themselves in the paper the way they would like to see themselves. We have a terrible situation actually with the theatre and with white practitioners of the theatre at the moment. There is some perception of the critic being the failed practitioner. I think there is some perception of me as that. At the end of the day there is not that great interest from readers in theatre reviewing at the moment.

TG: How do you know that?

MK: I know that because I know that there is a very failing audience for theatre. Yes, I'm surmising. I also read certain surveys and poles and know what is... We are in the process of surveying our readers again on this level. I could tell you what the high interest area is, and that is television listings. You have to arbitrate, because that's a very user-friendly thing.

Everybody wants it, and they want their newspaper to have every single thing on television inside it. But they don't necessarily want to read a story about one person's opinion of a play he's seen. We have a limited amount of pages and we have a national overview. We only got at the moment five feature pages for the national features of national cultural production. Which is not enough. But we are dictated to by advertising. And while the advertising is as low as it is because the money in the arts is so little, we got to maintain the range here.

In effect, we just now, this week, take on our first adverts for a chain of porn shops, pornography. They sell pornography, they sell sex aids, they're called Adult World. And we had advertised by a mistake, something was brought in, it was a sex aid called Chinese Brush. The people working in the advertisement department didn't know they were booking in this sex aid as an advert, and suddenly on the news pages here comes this thing for some sort of dildo with bristles on or whatever. Everybody was very shocked, because it is bad to have that in the news pages. But I have expressed that a tasteful, tasteful campaign for a major chain of porn stores is fine. They are not pimping women, they are not pimping men, they are not pimping children, they are not selling flesh, well, I suppose they are selling flesh, [but] they are not selling real people, they are selling representations of people, so I think that's fine. I need to do that in order to at least bring in some revenue for the arts pages at the moment, because they are generating nothing, nothing. And I'm not quite sure why.

TG: But are you responsible for that?

MK: I'm not responsible for it, but I'm responsible for a certain policy that goes on, like the selling of the front page of my section. As you see *Friday* as opposed to the *Tonight*. And I don't know what's happening in your country, but the front page we don't sell. Although I've also said that if there is a tasteful campaign, not from a porn-store, because we are not going to put that on the front, but if there is a tasteful campaign for the front, maybe some like the producer of the refreshment or something, that can have strip that we can sell. You know, the move now is very much towards lifestyle, and very much away from engaging meaningfully with cultural production.

TG: But do you think, because you have been talking about what the consumers or the audience want, you don't think that you would like to guide them in a different direction, as well? For example, they want TV, they want lifestyle, you don't think you have an ideal obligation to try and make interest...

MK: We have to arbitrate that. We have to arbitrate what we would really like to see, and what we know the very broader public of the newspaper would like to reach, once out of the newspaper. I am aware of that in the beginning of the existence of the *Friday* section there was a great swing to - because of the interests of my predecessor - kwaito, he was very interested in kwaito music, and he was very interested in conceptual art.

I try to keep as broadminded as possible when people they pitch ideas and stories. The dynamics of course has changed tremendously over the years. It doesn't matter what it is, they've completely altered now. The entire generation that the *Weekly Mail* spoke to first, which is even my generation, and people a little bit older than me are all in their peak earning capacity of their lives. They're sort of 30, late 30s to mid 50s. That is very interesting, because in the beginning, the *Weekly Mail* was speaking to a younger generation of anti-apartheid, the activist generation, the white activist generation, the charterist swing of the white activist generation in lines with the Communist Party, the ANC, the COSATU.

Now, the surveys tell us that there are more middle-class money earning black readers, who are of the same generation as me, a little bit younger. And it maintains, as they say, a faithful readership, traditional *Mail&Guardian* or *Weekly Mail* readership and it is, because of its disdain for corruption in the government pulling in a more conservative white readership at the same time. So what's happening is that the readership of the *Mail&Guardian* is in fact balancing out whereas before you could pinpoint what kind of person was reading. Now there is a greater variety of individuals who is reading. And what you have to do then is offer them a greater variety from the point of view of what is being articulated.

There isn't an activist type of culture going on as it used to be. We have to look for meaning in other things, and that is symptomatic for the entire country. It is not just symptomatic of one section of the newspaper. Everyone is grappling for post-apartheid meaning. Whatever that means. Whether that is redress, or just have a nice time, because we are free, ha, ha. Whatever hell it is, you know, the TRC that redress things, or if it's, very much the climate it is speaking to now, which is "join the world". We are in the process after the boycott of joining humanity. That is, from our point of view, one of the most interesting exercises. And something that we've not really got a handle on: How to deal with the influx of artists from overseas, what to say about them, how to carry them as stories. We are sheltered in a sense from really having to decide on that, by the fact that we are now owned by the *Guardian*, so when major artists come into the country, we are, some of the time we are fortunate to be able to run stories from the *Guardian* about those people. We don't have to sit decide what they're like from a distance. We are so far away from the mainstream of world culture really. It is very frustrating, I think.

TG: Do you have a want to also uplift artists that were previously unknown? That were previously suppressed? When I spoke to Charlotte Bauer about the beginning, in 1985, she talked about how politicised it was...

MK: Yes, exactly.

TG: In the arts section as well. And that they wanted to present artists that weren't that known, because of the difficulties of getting known. Now, I was wondering how this has changed during the years. You are talking about foreign artists as well, presenting them, but how are the more local...

MK: Look, what I'm thinking is that we have now joined the world. So, one of the things we do carry, is the showcasing of South African culture abroad, because that only happened within the confines of the anti-apartheid movement under the boycott. And I know, because I was working from the within the boycott structures myself, as part of the Congress of South African Writers. I was very much there, and I understood what was going on, and I was part of the controlling body of the boycott myself. The best thing about what is going on now is the cultural exchange, so we carry a story about when South Africans exhibit in New York. The exhibition's organisers paid for Brenda Atkinson to go there and look at it. Likewise there was an exhibition in Switzerland. She was our arts reviewer and was flown there, she went and she had a terrible time. She came back, and of course, she wrote an article saying that what they'd done was taken a whole of South African art and they slapped it up on the walls of the gallery in Switzerland without one thought of what they were juxtaposing. They just put it all together and said that this is South African art, and that it was a terrible exhibition. And of course, we had to give them an opportunity to reply. They wrote back and

said that it didn't look like she had such a terrible time in Switzerland while she was there, staying in a five star hotel, having big fat meals, having a glorious time. It was a dangerous thing, because that is what happens with those kind of arrangements. You don't know what people are being paid for. At least she was honest, and we gave the organisers a chance to reply. That is healthy debate. But that is not saying, "Oh, poor Africans who never had a chance, who have been used by colonialism." Who's the poorest artist out there that nobody knows. We must have that person in our paper, because history has been so shit to that person".

I won't do that as an editor. I'm not interested in that at all. I'm not interested in a bleeding heart liberalist scenario where the most down-trodden - we're not a church publication. It's out of the question. So, I'm interested in good culture, good art, excellence, because I've been through all of these stages of the transformation as everybody has. But I've been through it through the perspective of a person involved in arts production. And I've spent many years paying lip-service to the most down-trodden - to doing the whole uplifting speak thing. And at the end of the day you know, there are some people who are very good at what they do and there are some people who are very shit at what they do, it doesn't matter how much you're trying to uplift continually. As an arts section you have to try to showcase good culture as opposed to good upliftment. Those are development issues. And I don't think that the *Friday* section of the *Mail&Guardian* is a development publication at all. Not in the least. It's an arts, entertainment and culture round up of the week. And that is different. And so, people may think I am a complete fuck-up for steering it in that direction, but I'm not alone in that. That is what the requirement of the paper is. And if I didn't think it was right, I would go and work somewhere else. It doesn't mean that I am insensitive to those issues, but in a lot of ways, I think that our weight now [is on] the artists [who] distinguish themselves in some way. I'm not saying among their peers first and foremost - if they show the spark, then of course they can be there, but it must in some way that the public can see, like an exhibition, or an award, something tangible that people can hold on to. We're a bit low on issues, really, but I think that is the sign of the times.

TG: So what is good and what is bad arts journalism?

MK: I don't know. I think I'm suspect when it comes to bad arts journalism, because I'm not the world's greatest writer, I can assure you. Bad journalism is first and foremost dishonest arts journalism, obviously. Lies. Misrepresentation is bad. Not that too much honesty is good either, believe me. So, it's striking the balance. A healthy level of cynicism is sometimes a good thing also.

TG: What do you mean by dishonesty?

MK: [laughs] Look, if you look at the cultural terrain, every single person who is in cultural production - every single one of the disciplines as well as the sub-disciplines as well as the industry that support the disciplines, whether it is the lighting industry that supports, the concert industry that support... All of those people want to be in the newspaper. And you can have a very fine life cruising around from party to party and actually, if you are prepared to say the nicest things about everyone, you can have a really high time. The point of the matter is, we got a free meal at a restaurant, what is your obligation to that restaurant? It is shit, if the food is terrible. And sometimes people are not quite sure what to do. They've had the high time, and they've been enjoying themselves. And in the other end of the scale they are not quite sure how to then say to the public: "This is not really something you should go along

and witness". I try and smell that. I also don't have one of the sharpest noses. That also comes and goes. It is to arbitrate all of those things.

I suppose good arts journalism has a high degree of human interest. That is what distinguishes some of the *Guardian* stuff that we see that comes from overseas. It doesn't matter what they are writing about, you look at each individual artist's life and journey - they've managed to elucidate the drama for you. And you go with them and you find they're the lives of the exceptionally talented, funny, endearing. We're running a story about Tricky this week. And the story about him is about a person who basically came out of the gutter. Who could have been a crack-dealer, and ended up being one of the digital masters of the age. That is a lesson to everyone who reads the story. Don't look down on people when they come from a different class than you. Don't look down on if they have a different colour from you. He's not an exceptionally beautiful person. He looks rough, he's scared, but he is one of the exceptional talents of the world at the moment.

His story is wonderful. His mother gave him up, he grew up [with] half-brothers, half-sisters in a family that wasn't really his own. He distinguished himself all throughout that. Every single time he turned, he was an exceptional talent. The story manages to not go into it like a big thing. You know like: "Let's empower the man, and didn't he get a bursary?" It's just a light-hearted, beautiful story about another maniac on the block, that somehow is more exceptional than other people. And that is beautiful, that's wonderful. The writing doesn't have a mission, it doesn't have a purpose. The writer doesn't have an agenda [to] liberate society. The writer is writing a story about Tricky, and a great musician. That is a very important thing to remember, because the *Weekly Mail* came out of that liberal, liberationist history. It is not time for that now.

The *Sunday World*, a black newspaper, has set up an arts and entertainment pull-out like *Tonight*. It runs side to side with *Tonight*. But they are very on the mission. They don't like anything white, you want find a white face in their pull-out. They won't have a white writer. They are black-centred only. And very angry, and they want to redress. They are very firmly punting black culture. The mission is to showcase black culture, the good practitioners, the bad practitioners, everybody, you know. And I have a problem with that, obviously. Some people have a lot of admiration for the work they're doing, and I think that is another way of going. We could in a way take on some of those responsibilities. I couldn't, I'd lose my job in that case. But it is not in the nature of the paper to do that kind of work. But it's an interesting variation on the way arts and entertainment is carried.

TG: What makes arts journalism different from other genres, like news?

MK: Well, essentially it shouldn't. You know, because news is news and it should all ascribe to the same principles. To be current, to be the first, to be striving for truth, to be enlightening, to be unhampered and unhindered, all those things that journalism tradition is made up of. I hope I haven't left anything out? [laughs]

TG: I'm specifically thinking about what you have been talking a bit about. Closeness to sources for example. That you write about your friends, basically.

MK: That is problematic, but we do have safeguards, you know. We expect that people wouldn't really take on the responsibility of reviewing the people they work with. In a small intimate town like this, we make sure that it doesn't happen. If it does, it is a terrible omission

on our parts. We really, really do make sure that it doesn't happen. I know where people from record companies come and they want to write stories about their own products. You don't know in this environment who works for who. And so, you have to be very, very sharp, and we sniff them out, we virtually blacklist them. Firstly I must say that we try not to pay them, once we found out that it's happened. If I find out that it's happened, they must hassle for their money. And I block them. As they hassle for their money, so I say: "Well, you know what. You are getting paid by two sources. You're paid to do this, and suddenly you're arrived in my paper with a story". Because we do find people out. Obviously it has happened., but it is very rare.

We also have a policy of first person. We make that allowance, because the way Johannesburg is structured, or the way South Africa is structured. And so, we allow people to write stories where they say: "I directed a movie", or "I went along to watch my best friend's band". As long as the point of confession is there, and because we also understand that some people have privileged information, because [of] where they come from.

TG: And when it comes to subjectivity/objectivity?

MK: Subjectivity/objectivity are very subjective terms. Using your critical faculty is using your sense of subjectivity, isn't it? It depends what story it is really. If it is a review of an exhibition, then it's hard to be objective, because it's review format. I think that the arts is conducive to subjective writing, you know, colour, colour pieces. We are very privileged, I wouldn't work in hard news, because it wouldn't interest me at all. I think that we are allowed and that people expect it from us. They expect a high degree of subjectivity when they look at arts reportage. It means that we are somewhere between reportage and creative writing.

TG: Do you write for the same people in the arts section as in the rest of the paper?

MK: It's not unproblematic, because we are worrying very much now about who reads us and how. We know that people are consuming differently in different sectors of society. And now there, at the moment we are asking our readers for responses [on] whether or not we should run more DStv. I think it is almost 40 channels or something like that. It traverses a lot of the continent now. And we only do highlights about that much, and our editor seems to think there is a greater demand for it, there's a demand we are not meeting for the listings and so he is asking us to survey our readers as to whether or not we should bring down a daily listing and bring up our pay-channel listings. And that's controversial, because what you are saying then is that our readers are more mobile, that more of them are buying this very expensive commodity DStv. And less of them are watching the public broadcaster. The public broadcaster relies on us anyway to do a full listing of them. And they service us from that level, and their broadcasting [has] transformed itself. Although I think this paper has an ongoing war with the SABC.

We look very seriously at television because it's part of the whole transformation to see those people who came out of the theatre. Under the anti-apartheid it was the living newspaper, because people boycotted the SABC, nobody worked for the SABC, and there was no film-industry. The radio was compartmentalised, there was censorship scenario in the newspapers, as they began to call the theatre the living newspaper. And now of course that moved over, so you see many of the same people who [were] very credible, who in the earlier times on television now, and you see many of the dramatists who were working in theatre, now working in television, making a lot of money, who are doing very, very well and are doing

shit basically. Many of them do terrible, terrible, terrible drama, but there they are and the public is watching them, some of the soap operas, *Generations*, *Isidingo*, you know, some of these comedies, like *Big Okes*, and you look at them and you despair. But the public watches it and it is our responsibility if public money is being spent on that, the production of that stuff to look at it, and I think that we have a television reviewer called Robert Kirby, he's vitriolic, nobody can hate as well as that man can hate, and so it's quite a good thing.

TG: Do you think arts journalism is important?

MK: No. I mean I really, I don't think so at all. You know, I mean of course if you want to make a place for it being important, you could. It could be very convincing and if you want to make a place for it to not be important you could do it as one of those, like a high school debate, where you put two people up. I don't know, it's important in so far as the entertainment scenario of a city like this is, these are industries that don't really exist, the fine art industry is like that big, the film industry is that big, the theatre industry is not an industry, the book industry... These publishers sell 800 books of creative writing in a year, of a novel, a South African novel. Unless of course it's a prescription at schools, so I mean you're talking about very low quantities, you're talking about a very small industry. You don't pull in advertising because basically there is no money there to spend on theatre and the arts. Maybe on some things like big raves and that kind of thing, they all advertise in the *Times*. That's probably why people are moving into the lifestyle area, because there is more money in sort of like stark lemon squeezers than there is in contemporary dance. Although the dance seems to be very effervescent.

As a commentator and as a consumer guide, art journalism is very unimportant. It's very much on the periphery of the reportage world. Even though it can be so incredibly nice there's an interesting thing going on more human-interest stories coming into the main body of the newspaper. We're lucky because we have an editor who runs things like a big story about Bob Dylan, or I don't know if you saw it a couple of weeks ago. There was a big look at Bob Dylan at 60, I think he turned 60 years old, and that's fun. And it gives the whole paper a bit of a magazine feel and I think that's what's happened to many newspapers. Take a look at the *Guardian* for example, art is moving into the news, but the news is not moving into the arts, what is news in the arts. People steal money, that's news. Somebody incredibly famous dies, that's news. Enormous budgets get spent on things, that's news. Bob Dylan turning 60 is not really news but it's a good human-interest story, because look at the life he's led. So it does become news, but its not really headlines, "Bob Dylan Turns Sixty", it's not a headline, exactly.

In my entire life [I've] always get involved in things [that are] unimportant basically. I always ask myself, if you're involved then it must be worth nothing. It has its own attractions but it's not vital to the existence of human beings. There may be a philosophical argument for it, I haven't heard a convincing one yet. I think that when culture was very much being battled, I know, because when I was a naughty actor, being arrested and tried and going around, Charlotte Bauer was following me with a notebook and there were reams of stories about me in the *Weekly Mail* and I felt incredibly important. Because I was being banned by the government the paper thought it was so important because there were censorship trials. In times of crisis, culture begins to play a different role. And now the crisis is different, you know, there is a crisis still but it's not a crisis of conscience, this is very Kahlil Gibran. Our lives are a favour given to us by the financiers of the newspaper, we live on grace. Which is sad, and sad in the arts, because it should not be like that. The orchestras have closed down,

the classical dance companies have closed, the provincial arts, a couple of these have been punished in this place because of the role they played. The major venues are all trying to sustain themselves financially. We are not an advertising agent for arts or for theatre or for dance, which most people think we are, they think that we're there to advertise them, which they can fuck off basically, [laughs] I laugh when I hear that.

TG: What do you think are the hindrances to good arts journalism, [I'm] thinking of South Africa today and in general?

MK: I think the divisions in communities are a terrible hindrance. The lack of homogeneity in the culture in this country is interesting if you can use it. Terribly disturbing if you are trying to deal with it, and the language barriers are bad, and the class barriers are bad, and the lack of access certain people have to resources is bad and the thing that hinders good arts journalism is that where there is dire lack of resources, it should be interesting to people. That is news for example. But here we sit in the city with enormous facilities, and out there in the country there is, it's a culture, I wouldn't say it's a cultural wasteland, because people do their own traditional dancing, then they're expressing themselves culturally. One cannot say it's a cultural wasteland because that amounts to being a racist. You see some exceptionally good crafts people and arts workers are actually living, are making do with nothing, nothing, nothing. But the readership that is buying the paper is not interested in being hit all time with bleeding heart stories about the lack of resources for the arts community outside of the cities, and so we don't reinvent those stories all of the time. If there's an exceptional artist who comes up from those ranks and ends up being in the spotlight, in a public gallery, then we run a story about the triumph of the human will and all of that stuff, the struggle to survive in the arts.

The story of this Wendy Mseleku is very interesting. She is a very highly regarded young jazz singer, and she fell pregnant and she lost the child and she didn't have enough money for her own healthcare and so she died recently. And her story was a bit shocking to everyone because there she was a highly regarded jazz musician and she didn't have enough resources to take care of herself when her pregnancy went bad. It was a bit in everyone's faces and the arts community was outraged, they were very outraged. There was a story. When we've been invited to local country initiatives, we've actually done them. We've taken up and we've actually run those stories. Likewise with the *Star Tonight* there is a good dance writer called Adrienne Sichel, she follows the contemporary dance scene very religiously and has managed to find some interesting dance initiatives in unbelievable places.

But okay, so what hinders good arts journalism? It's the language barriers, the cultural barriers, again the fact that we can't pay the best writers to get them on our side. It's always a problem that our resources are stretched, so we always use new writers and writers who work from a position of good will.

TG: How many do you have who works for the arts...?

MK: Me and Riaan are full time. We used to have a staff of nine and then we have a retainer person in Durban, Alex Sudheim, who does the lists. We do a lot of listing now, which is different to the way it used to be. You know I had a person on the retainer to do fine art listings and there is a person to do Cape Town. So three retainers, two full time, and then there is Shaun de Waal who you know I can't do without. It is not big enough, dominated by white males which is a transformation problem. I wouldn't know how to deal with that, apart

from resigning. I think transformation is an essential aspect of the newspaper's life and I don't even know the dynamics, I don't know what the law says, I know the law is changing, so we may all be out on our arses at some stage, who knows. It's not an issue to arts reportage, it's labour relations.

TG: What are the goals of arts journalism?

MK: I've never thought like this in my life. The basic goals I suppose like honesty, the usual stuff, which is to be as truthful as you can, the code of journalism that exists. To write it all in under 900 words, that's one of the goals, [laughs], to be able to do that, believe me, I suppose some people can. We are all striving for excellence in writing, to try to get people to write as well as possible. And in English, which is unbelievable, because there is no, or very few African language newspapers. Because of the divisions in society people can't really break out. They can't express themselves really can they. It's all very difficult, you know. In this country, sometimes you just want to give up, despair, because of the way people are divided. There has to be a transformation aspect inherent in the worldview of every single South African, I mean there has to be if they're not to jump into the sea. [That is] to try to be honest as a writer, to your sense of what that transformation means. Even if it means as I say, that it's more honest to showcase excellence than to be a bleeding heart liberal because then you're being true to transformation, rather than just paid lip service that make you look like a better person. Rather than showcasing the underdog because you know you will be celebrated for that. That's part of the mission, and that's part of the nose [that] has to smell as an editor, is this really good, what are the agendas at play? I'm not making the answers simple for you at all. I can't give you a hit list, I refuse to.

TG: What is the relation between entertainment and the arts?

MK: That's very interesting. I've been in the entertainment industry literally, I've been in the arts and entertainment, I got my first professional roles when I was 17, which was in 1978/9. So I've been going since the 1970s in the arts world over here. As soon as we became rebellious, serious youth, if anyone said the word entertainment, we would just scream them out of the room, that was such a shit word to use to people who were being seriously, visionary, revolutionary artists. And so the word entertainment never occurred to people. But you know the whole 1980s understanding of drama, it was playing such an important role from a Brechtian perspective. And Brecht is not a silly philosopher and he always understood what the balance between the politicking, didacticism and entertainment. He was master of it. We were all trying to be Brecht. I think that's very out of fashion [now], and I think that there's only one company now that's doing that kind of work and that's Junction Avenue Theatre Company. They are sticking religiously with the Brechtian formula in the belief that it still has something to say in this day and age. William Kentridge has become such an enormously powerful artist, he is South Africa's major artist. He comes out of the theatre group, and you can see his work has its roots in early German expressionism, where there are these two diametric opposites, humanity in the middle screaming what are we to do?

The word is arbitration, to try to actually swing it this way or that way, but at the moment the people are very... lifestyle, entertainment, people are in a mode of escapism, they really are and I think that this country is. There is a lot of escapism going on. An even in the conceptual art scene people think they are confronting issues so head-on they are using a formulaic approach to things and the more abhorrent they are sometimes, the more they think they are actually really dealing with things. There's one person who's now formed an autopsy with a

static camera, like [imitates sounds of cracking bones]. You can't look at it, and of course it is saying interesting things about the body and all that shit and all those academic perspectives and all the buzz words that are sexy now. It's not very entertaining, but it has a shock value which is the...

TG: Which is quite entertaining.

MK: Yes, which could be entertaining, the shock value, "oh my God look at that, it's the inside of someone's testicles". Two weeks ago, Dionne Warwick played at a casino, I've never in my life spent so much time in a casino as I'm doing now. The cultural landscape is changing with the opening up of the system. Casinos are flourishing, people are gambling a lot more, the great Vegas acts are coming to casinos, Dionne Warwick is a great Vegas act, she is the original. And then there's a lavish dinner thrown for her at a side banqueting hall, and all of the Mandela's in the corner and Cyril Ramaphosa's over there, there's an entire new class of multi-millionaires, the whole span of African Americans in a corner. There's a whole new society. Now, you can sit there with a lot of disdain and say this is a load of shit, but the superbowl was full... All the little theatres, Carnival City Auditorium was full. And there where the top generations, there were white people weeping, black people weeping and Dionne was just cruising along, with glitter, her hair, her nails - it was very groovy. I found that it a very beautiful evening's entertainment. 20 years ago I would have gone there and just said fuck you get me out of here, you go home, because that would have been the boycott.

It is mass market appeal, how would one be in an environment like this, in a press environment if you wrote a story about how shit the casinos are, how disgusting Dionne Warwick is, how awful the Mandela's are for eating with her, and people, how fucking awful people are for gambling their money away every night. We aren't a church publication, you know. It's got its distasteful side, but then again, our advertisement department is knocking on the door of the casinos for advertising revenue, there has to be a consistency. One has to actually approach it with an open mind. I don't gamble, I don't think gambling is a great thing to do. Sun City is a scream, it's a joke basically, when you go there and see the poorest people in the world chucking all their money into the machines that look like that.

TG: Where do the ideas come from what to write about? A thing I've noticed is that for example Thebe Mabanga always writes about black artists. How does it happen?

MK: It happens that way because he knows - I delegate, he knows about those artists. He knows more about them than I know. Likewise this chap who is sitting over here, Wolmerans, knows more about white rock artists because that is what he listens to, local white rock. It would be silly for me to try to say to the one who likes white rock artists he must only go talk to black artists and for someone who listens to black contemporary music to only go and talk to whites. In order to transform South Africa, people must be used for what they are good at. I know that we are planning one supplement now about the festive season and they have brought in a guest editor to do it and she is adamant about exactly that. About using men to write about domestic household affairs, like cooking and housekeeping and to use people in an interesting and contrary way to what you would expect, but she had the luxury of a very long leading. I just have to send the few people that I've got now, who know about it.

TG: I was also wondering about the *Friday* section a few weeks ago. There were two stories on fine arts that were placed in the news pages.

MK: We have a conference on Monday morning with the reporters and the editor. And then he will take for himself what he likes from my diary. There's this guy called Valentine Cascarino, he has a very interesting history. The father is French, there's a Spaniard somewhere, he's from all over the place. He's a real citizen of the world, and yet he is an African. He's got a bit of Cameroon, he's a Frenchman. He's a very interesting person, he's not the greatest writer in the world, but he's writing in a third language. He's African, French and then English, and I sent him out to write about the corner hairstyle culture in the city, because it's all run by people from other African countries. Again that was me sending another African, a person from another African country to descend with the people he can mingle with people as discreetly as possible and the editor said: "That's a nice story for me, for the news", you know the human interest aspect.

TG: I have copied a few of your articles.

MK: Do you want me to autograph them for you? [laughs]

TG: [laughs] I was wondering if you could comment on them in relation to what we have been talking about.

MK: This is about an award that doesn't exist anymore, the Vita award. When I wrote this I didn't know the people who were organising the awards very well. Now I know them because they've made it their business to be my best friend, and I was very disdainful. But you know, the early 90s up until 95 was very telling for the theatre. It was the twilight years of the, theatre is a very powerful cultural institution and now it's really floundering.

[New article] This is more recent and everybody was angry with me about this. I thought everybody was so sexist, these fucking comedians over here - I don't know how good [Ronnie Modimola] was, but the Capetonian comedy collective got hold of me and they were very like: "We have more black comedians in Cape Town and we want you to run a story on our comedians". And I sent out my Cape Town guy called Guy Willoughby and he came back with the exact same perspective as I had, so I felt quite placated.

TG: But you were quite nice, even though you didn't think he was very funny.

MK: Well I interviewed him, and I allowed him to have his say, he was the only black comedian up on the stage that night. He was the only one there and it was interesting to see that in Johannesburg there was only one black stand up comedian. There may be more now, I don't know, but he is still one of the lone voices out there, and so he was interesting in that sense although I don't think he cracked the interview. Although we managed to cobble it together to make him look like he knew what he was doing. He was on the cover, because he is funny and he is a bit of a phenomenon. The comedy circuit has really blossomed, its enormous, the comedy circuit is big and powerful at the moment, there are many stand up comedians and they are doing very well for themselves.

TG: Do you follow the ideals you have for what good arts journalism is?

MK: I try to make it funny, a little bit confrontational. There's nothing wrong with the way Ronnie Modimola puts his humour forward. He didn't crack this particular interview, which is a pity, he is not skilled with the media, but he still is a phenomenon in the comedy circuit. There is a handful of black stand up comedians and they are trying very hard to do something

new for black comedy, and they are full of traps every now and then of stereotyping themselves, of seeing black people just as criminals and joking it off, and some of that I've tried to get to [in this interview]. If you follow the interview, you'll see how he didn't crack the interview, it's quite explanatory, he wasn't able to answer the questions for himself and so we sort of left it like that. So I tried to follow my own lead.

[New article] I hated this play [*Birdie*], I thought there was a lot of posturing, I know these young people, this is the new generation of white actors. This is kind of off the record although it's on the record, they are adamantly closing themselves in as young, white actors, they don't seem to work with black people, they don't seem to take on very indigenous subjects. They are in denial about where they are living. They would rather be living in London as most actors would be doing. As you can see from the review, I found that the posturing and the style of writing was out of date, and it didn't say what it had to say at the end of the day.

**INTERVIEW WITH THEBE MABANGA, THE MEDIA MILL, JOHANNESBURG,
4.11.2000**

Presently journalist in the *Mail&Guardian*

Large parts of the interview were inaudible because of bad acoustics in the room and problems with the tape.

THEBE MABANGA (TM): I went to Wits University to study B. Comm in Information System and Economics. I didn't finish that. I have just written my third year economics exam at UNISA. When I was at Wits University I worked for the radio station there, and one of the things I ended up doing was theatre for the radio station. I met Matthew Krouse, he was still at the Market theatre.

TERESA GROGAN (TG): When was this?

TM: 1997. Then he became the deputy arts editor, [and] publish[ed] [my stories] now and again. Here in South Africa, someone has to die before you can get a chance with the radio. Then I just tried writing. I tried the *YFM* magazine. I did a story for them on the Grahamstown arts festival, because I attended the festival in 1998. I did a story for them to print in the 98 edition, which was the 25 edition, a big one. I interviewed Matthew Krouse. I also spoke to arts editor of the *Star Tonight*. I did a feature for the *YFM* magazine.

TG: When did you first start here?

TM: In August last year.

TG: Are you working part time?

TM: Since February, full time, as a news reporter. I do all sorts of things.

TG: How would you define arts journalism?

TM: I would say arts journalism, it is presenting various aspects of popular culture, and presenting them in a very palatable, accessible manner. Especially in a country like South Africa, where segments of arts and fine arts have not been accessed by a majority of the population. Our challenge is to take it and demystify it basically. For instance, there are misconceptions around theatre, especially in the townships. You think that the person who [didn't see] it, has missed out on this. So you must write about it in a way that makes them want to go and see it. Not lying about it. Print it in a palatable way, not a simple way. I like it when my cousin read it. That's how I define arts journalism.

TG: What do you mean by misconceptions?

TM: You know, you talk to a person. I tell them I went to the theatre and I saw blah blah. And he goes "ah, theatre, people dancing around in tights". It is a challenge to make them see there is a bit more than just tights, in some instances there is not, but not all theatre is like that.

TM: There is a relationship between politics and arts. First because arts is used to reflect [a specific time and place]. In South Africa, I don't know if you've heard of protest theatre. It was used to reflect the politics of the time. The next relationship would be where politicians can use art as a tool to encounter their own agenda.

[...]

TG: Would you agree that there is also politics in what you chose to write about in arts journalism?

TM: Yes, there is. For example, If I chose to write about kwaito, which has been in the process of evolving since the 90s - somebody say it's bad, and I write that it is not as bad as you say, some of it is, but not all of it. [not direct quote: These are young, black kids, we should give them a chance. Then I can say to the establishment, you cannot keep producing trash and hope to be taken serious. There is that balancing. So there is politics in what you chose to write, yes. I believe there are many playing on sex appeal and very little talent. But also in a very esoteric and particular way, maybe not in my case, but certainly with Shaun de Waal, he is [an] esoteric arts writer in this country. I would argue that there is politics in the way he choose to write about arts].

TG: Do you think arts journalism is important?

TM: It is. You need someone to make sense of the madness that goes around us.

[...]

TG: What would you say is the difference between arts journalism and other genres, like news, in terms of subjectivity/objectivity?

TM: In arts journalism I found there is a lot of flair. There's room for a lot of flair. When I write an article, I rewrite the introduction three times. Hard line news stories [does not have room] for flair. In terms of objectivity/subjectivity I wouldn't say there is much difference.

[...]

TG: How would you say the use of sources, or closeness to sources is different in arts journalism from other genres?

TM: From my perspective, I wouldn't say very much [difference], I'll tell you why. In politics there's this guy who recently died, he was the spokesperson for the president. I was reading an obituary by a lady, a political correspondent, and she couldn't bring herself to ask those questions [if he had AIDS or not] because they had become friends. [Being friends is also positive, you get stories you otherwise wouldn't have got.]

TG: Would you say it's a problem [getting to close]?

TM: It can be.

TG: Readership, is that different in the arts from the other genres?

TM: *Mail&Guardian* arts readership is very esoteric, cultured, with BA degrees from Wits, experienced with theatre and television from foreign countries, so... In that sense, yes.

TG: But when you write stories in different sections of the *Mail&Guardian*, do you write for different people?

TM: Not really.

TG: What make you chose to write, to pick your stories? Are they delegated, or do you choose?

TM: A combination. I just write what interests me, that grab me. When I chose a story, it must be something I know a bit about.

TG: I brought a couple of your articles, and I would like you to comment on those in relation to what we have been talking about.

TM: [First article] This was an opportunity to profile a choreographer I've known about since 1992. Here I was in a position to talk to him, and he was doing something at [the FNB Vita Dance Umbrella]. I wrote about him in a magazine called *Tribute*. I know the head of the company.

TG: This was something you chose to write about, or was it delegated?

TM: I chose. [New article] And this is where I could bring in my economics. I sat down and spoke to Walter Chakela, the administrator. Here, I brought in the economics. Why is the theatre closing down? They don't have enough income. It's a very frustrating situation, it's a question of economics, it's a reflection of the state [of art in South Africa]. A few days earlier I had covered the acute situation of the artists, the artists' welfare, improvements in the industry, social structures for artists. Again, that links in with the economics. What I found with economics is that, it has really helped me to ask the right questions, whatever problem.

TG: It seems divided in the arts section - that the white journalists write about white art and artists and I've seen you, only or mostly, on black arts and artists. Why is that? Is that because you want to? Or, is it knowledge? Would you have a goal of trying to present black artists to your audience in the *Mail&Guardian*?

TM: Knowledge, knowledge. [It's about what makes sense for me to cover. I have written on white artists as well]. Of course I do [want to present black artists to a white audience]. All journalists do. Last year I did a broad - for the December issue, I did a cover story about kwaito. I wanted to present black artists to a white audience. Definitely.

**INTERVIEW WITH IVOR POWELL, PRETORIA,
3.11. 2000**

**Previously arts journalist in the *Mail&Guardian*
Presently senior special investigator for the Scorpions**

As a result of too much noise in the background, parts of the interview were inaudible.

IVOR POWELL (IP): I started off as an academic arts historian. I was teaching at Wits and UNISA and then the *Mail&Guardian* got started and for their very first edition, because I knew the people, I wrote an article. The very first time I'd ever written. I'd not been a dutiful academic until then. Then I got more and more involved in it and eventually left academia in favour of journalism.

TERESA GROGAN (TG): Where did you study?

IP: I studied at UCT and then at WITS and then started teaching at UNISA. I left UNISA quite suddenly, it's an irrelevant story. From arts journalism I got involved in political journalism. I got more and more involved in that and the balance of those things went from one to the other - writing about art, writing about politics. I got more involved in investigative journalism over the last about ten years. I left the *Mail&Guardian* at some point in about 89 to go to the *Sunday Star*, it was a political correspondence. Then I went across to *Vrye Weekblad*, which had been Afrikaans language but it had evolved by the time I went there as an assistant editor in charge of politics, although I did some arts writing there as well. I left there and went to the *Sunday Times*. I sort of wandered around newspapers for a long time. I edited an arts magazine for one edition.

TG: Which one?

IP: It was called *Ventilator*. It was fairly obscure. We got funding from - in fact we stole funding from the South African Association for Arts, which was quite a reactionary organisation, a white organisation at the time and we put out quite a subversive magazine that they - it wasn't actually subversive, it was just an arts magazine. But after the first time, it never came again, and it was closed down. And then I worked at various other newspapers. But now, my punch line is, I'm now sort of a policeman. I'm with the Scorpions for the last month.

TG: What does that mean, sort of policeman?

IP: I'm a senior special investigator, with a policing organisation that been set up on the model of the FBI basically.

TG: What made you do that?

IP: I was doing more and more investigative journalism. The head of the whole thing. The national directors, offered me a job and I said "okay, let me take it for a few years".

TG: I've been spotting your name in the *Mail&Guardian* until quite recently.

IP: I only started at the beginning of last month. So I went straight from the *Mail&Guardian* to this job. So that's my career path.

TG: How would you define arts journalism?

IP: I think it's changed from place to place and from time to time. I think I was very lucky in that, when I was really involved in arts journalism there was a purpose to it. There was a strong kind of political purpose and there were issues that needed to be addressed and there was an arts establishment that really needed to be challenged. I mean you could seem as though you were part of something that was changing the way that things were. In a way we were very lucky, at the particular time because there was a real sense of a mission and a purpose. The moment that time was over, my interest in art shifted completely. In general I'm less interested in art and arts journalism and things like that than I used to be, ever since then. Because it doesn't have that purpose, that sense of purpose. And I'm much more involved, as far as art goes, in what I like and just sort of enjoying art for, for my own point of view, not trying to persuade anyone else about it. I think that's the big difference.

There was a reality that needed to be challenged at that time, and it was, it was under-laid by politics and overwritten by politics. But politics in that particular case I think is a kind of inadequate word because it's not, it's not that same thing as like politics in your kind of situation, or the American situation, where it doesn't really matter who you vote for. The way that establishment used culture and the arts and manifested itself through the arts and culture. If you look at what we were doing in culture at that time - the underlying issue was the definition of culture. Because culture was always what the whites had. Art belonged to the whites and particularly to the European tradition. Our membership in the sort of quote-unquote "civilised world" was guaranteed by us and manifested in the kind of art we had. On the other hand, you had everything that black people did and the traditions of black people, well they were crafts and curios. And that divide was the real frontier, because it was what needed to be closed down and questions needed to be asked. That's certainly what I thought about it. You know, one never thinks about being an activist journalist. I don't know exactly how to say this, but you don't always write what you believe. I mean my real arts interest is in very gentle, nice things.

T: What do you mean by that?

IP: If I had the option, I would far prefer Italian Renaissance and things like that. I don't particularly like strident message orientated political art. But because of that overlying, or underlying issue, one addressed that. I wasn't ever really in favour of propaganda as such. But if you're coming from that kind of perspective - I mean [it's] been many different times when it could be a kind of failure of responsibility, of consciousness, to ignore those things and just pursue the things that I really like. I'm overstating it, but essentially that's the case.

TG: And how has arts journalism from 80s and [early] 90s changed?

IP: There's a big move these days to ironically go back to - now that we've got rid of the guilt of being white - to go back to exactly that kind of sense of being part of a world culture, which means first world culture. And a lot of people that are much more involved in whatever the art magazine of the moment, *Flashlight* is the last one I remember but it's partly been superseded. Entering into that kind of world, we're pretending that we're part of somewhere

else, embracing an internationalist kind of culture rather than a third world or a local kind of culture. And I think most of the art's like that and I don't read it myself.

TG: Is it not good arts journalism? It's just not interesting?

IP: There are good writers and there are bad writers but I don't feel moved to do it because it doesn't engage me. When I read it, I enjoy it, I'm not making an issue out of this. It's just that I don't feel personally that what's happening in either culture or cultural journalism, has got much to say to me.

TG: How would define good and bad arts journalism?

IP: Wow, there's a question! I wouldn't want to offer a definition, but I think that good arts journalism, or arts journalism generally that interests me, would engage with the consciousness of a particular time and/or place - critically engage with it and hold it up so that it would inform about the way that things are being experienced through the way they are being reflected in the art that is being made. That it actually talks to the condition of life in a particular place and a particular time.

TG: It has to talk about society in some way?

IP: No, no, I think it can talk about private experiences, it can talk about anything but it has to engage with something that's very specific and intangible about a condition of life. To again go back to South Africa in the 80s, the condition of life was overlaid with politics. At this point I would say that issues of information overload is probably, if I were working in that field, what I would be interested in. I'd be interested in the way the consciousness is being changed by IT, internet and e-mail, which I think is a very profound change. Just off the top of my head, that's the kind of issues that would be interesting for me at this particular time, the condition of life, the way it seems to change, and the way it's your experience, the way your subjectivity is being reflected and changed and to challenge - to make it visible and to make people experience their own experience.

TG: And then bad arts journalism?

IP: Anything that fails to do that. Particularly anything that tries to make art into something that is, a specialised thing only for experts. Anything that only speaks to me for my 20 years studying [the arts].

TG: What are the hindrances to good arts journalism?

IP: The universities [laughs].

TG: Where you come from yourself.

IP: I used to work at UNISA, which is this huge correspondence university. And I used to amuse myself by going through all those sort of academic dissertations that had been made. It was like, and this is literally true, how the shape of Africans', Negros' skulls predicts lower intelligence. That would be a thesis, you could get your doctorate on that kind of shit.

TG: What makes the arts journalism not interesting any more?

IP: I don't really know the answer. Even when I read it, it is sometimes quite interesting, but in a mild and distant way. But the question is why doesn't it engage me. I usually feel that I can read too easily what's lying behind it. A lot of the *Mail&Guardian* stuff, which I thought was quite interesting... Actually I don't think it is interesting at all, frankly. Because it's not challenging enough. I'm not interested in like people sticking pins into themselves, I'm not outraged by people sticking pins into themselves, when 20, 30 years ago, people were cutting up their dicks. My level of outrage is way beyond what people are doing and what people are writing, and the way they are writing. And I also think that I'm much more interested in inward and individual things. I don't think you can ever separate between the idea of the arts and the arts journalists. Most art is operating on a level that I don't find interesting. There's a trick that started coming into the way that art mean recently, the last 15-20 years with post-modernism, where meaning and significance become whatever number of element, it's not the guide anymore, there aren't any quality in the arts anymore. What I mean by that is that the art today refers, but it doesn't try to understand what it refers to. So, it's all this sort of spinning around on a literary kind of circus and not really engaging. In a way I find that interesting, I find it conceptually interesting, but I'm more interested in naming arms dealers. I've only got so much time, that I'm much more interested in bringing arms dealers into jail.

TG: What are the goals of arts journalism? Have these changed?

IP: Yes, I think definitely they do. The reality of time, place or condition of life changes. I really do think that black arts journalists have a very different [view] of the role of criticism. A lot of the stuff I don't relate to personally, but they have a very strong sense of mission, of black consciousness, fight - bringing black artists into the foreground of things, into the limelight and so on. They want black artists there, music is the easiest example, where [there is] a very powerful cult around people like Hugh Masekela, and Jonas Gwangwa. Their sense of it is very different. And maybe that's another point to be made, that it is also about where you're coming from inside a particular reality. I only write in terms of how that situation effected me in my particular situation. Now, in your condition that is probably a very obvious thing to say, but it is not the condition in South Africa where you have that huge divide between white experience and black experience. So the goals will be different. Black artists are very seldom interested in traditional ways of creating arts. It's much more about black uprising, black being part of the world. It's a gross generalisation, but there is some truth in it. In a lot of ways traditional things are embarrassing, something that we must move away from, something that their grandparents did, whereas we are fascinated, because I am looking at it from the outside and I am looking for the history... That's a big difference.

TG: What is the relation between entertainment and the arts?

IP: I think some art entertains. I think it is an overlap area. Very often I think low culture is truer and a lot more meaningful than the so-called high culture. I don't see a divide between the two, I think it is a continuum rather than an area of overlap. The histories of the disciplines are different and what they are looking for, and what you are working with. I think that if more high art were conscious of not entertaining, but conscious of its audience, conscious of communicating. Communicating is a lot more important than anything else.

[...]

TG: How is this in relation to art for art's sake?

IP: I don't know what art for art's sake means. I do know what art for art's sake means, and how I would read art for art's sake is a way of escaping from all, denying the reality of who we are, which is a coded way of talking about the reality that you are moving. It goes back to Marcel Duchamp's state, where he said: "I'm not an anti-artist. I'm an un-artist". Art for art's sake could be quite an interesting subject matter, but actually behind it, it is a code usually, for what it is denying.

TG: How would you say arts journalism is different from other genres in terms of subjectivity/objectivity?

IP: All journalism is subjective. As a journalist, your basic job is to persuade people that your view of the world, or whatever it is, is [the right or the true one]. Arts journalism has a lot more freedom and the balance between persuasion and recording is different [from news journalism].

TG: How about use of sources or closeness to your sources?

IP: Every journalist is depending on its sources to get information. You get your information from somebody. What is potentially different in arts journalism is that you need to assimilate opinions from your sources rather than facts from your sources. That's a big difference. You're talking about the meaning of things, much more than talking about what happened. What is also a difference is that a hell of a lot of arts journalism is about social pressure in that you are putting forward the yearns and the way that a particular group, social group, wants to see things. It's a good way of social climbing for lot of arts journalists, which it isn't for other journalists. It's like a reflective gallery a lot of the time that arts journalists pick up upon. It's not the same thing for other journalists.

TG: In relation to this, when you wrote about the arts, how did you choose your subjects?

IP: Mainly what pissed me off. Or sometimes what challenged me. Or other times what the editors asked me to go and look at. There were a variety of reasons, but in real terms, what interested me or challenged me one way or the other, particularly what pissed me off.

[...]

IP: [The fact that the affluent are the only one who can afford to enjoy the arts] is an important factor in the history of this country. The general rule is that black artists, however wonderful they are, are wanting to make money, and they have to make money, because they have to eat. Whereas most white artists have other jobs, at universities or whatever.

TG: Was this the situation before, or are you talking about the state of the arts today?

IP: What has changed, is that most artists these days are pitching themselves at overseas audiences. I don't mean that just in a sense of wanting to embrace the world. It is a living on sponsorships and scholarships and such, there are an enormous number of these, and a lot of my friends, they are travelling, that is what they do, that is how they make a living, they make art for Sweden and they make art for - that's how they get paid. That is actually how they live.

TG: Are you talking about the state of the art today?

IP: Yes, I am very much talking about the state of the arts today. As a result of what it used to be, there are huge amounts of cultural funding, scholarships and exchange programs. And especially my black friends, but it's not only them. They are moving around from place to place, they are exhibiting in Stockholm, they're exhibiting in Copenhagen. That's how they do it. And good luck to them, it's great. Fantastic. They make good livings, and they do what they like doing, and doing it the way they want to do it, but it is the economy I am talking about, the economy of the art has shifted.

[...]

IP: When I was writing about the arts, there was an amazing energy and commitment.

[...]

IP: I don't think we have a South African culture yet. And the way that relates to journalism, is that it is exactly issues like those that journalists should be engaging in. One of the things that arts journalism does, is focus reality into issues for other people, or for the culture in general. I don't see enough of that actually, going back to an old question.

[...]

**INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM PRETORIUS, MELVILLE, JOHANNESBURG,
31.10. 2000**

Previously freelance arts journalist for the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian*

Presently freelance journalist for various media and back-up film critic for the *Mail&Guardian*.

WILLIAM PRETORIUS (WP): Basically for me, it started in 1976 when I became a journalist mainly by accident. I studied at a place called UNISA, that's the University of South Africa. I liked reading a lot. I was working in the mining industry. And I started at an Afrikaans newspaper called *Rapport* as an art journalist. When I started there we had eight arts pages. We did books in depth, films, fine arts music, everything. Then the *Mail&Guardian* started in 1985 I think it was ... I was approached by Charlotte Bauer, who was the arts editor at the time, to find out if I was interested in doing arts for them, and that's how I got involved there. But before that I would say for about a good ten years I'd worked in an Afrikaans newspaper doing arts, which covered local arts and everything like that. What was interesting for me was I had an English book column in an Afrikaans newspaper, where I did local books and there was quite a strong desire there to promote local reading, to promote local theatre.

Working for an Afrikaans paper - they never ever sort of embargoed anything, or banned anything, we discussed all the protest theatre that came up, like *Asinamali*, in fact when the Market Theatre opened up, we did very extensive stories on it. So my introduction to arts journalism was basically instilled an interest in local culture, one could say, and art. And then I went to work as a film reviewer for the *Mail&Guardian*.

I grew up in a small town called Vereeniging, where I read a lot. I always had a keen interest in books and films, and then I came to Johannesburg where I worked in the mining industry of all places.

TERESA GROTTAN (TG): You worked in the mining industry as a?

WP: Basically as an estimator. I started off as a fitter and turner to be honest. While I was in the mining industry, I studied at UNISA, English 1, 2 and 3. While I was doing this I happened to meet someone who was working at *Rapport* who asked me if I would be interested in doing part time work for them and I took it, and of course then it turned into full time work after about two years of part time.

TG: What made you interested in the arts?

WP: Look, just about everybody was interested in the arts. When you grow up in a small town, the only contact you have with a lot of things is through arts, through books and through novels and through films. Of course, as a kid, you are very much into the American stuff. But the arts for me basically in a country are where your discussion points arise, where your debates arise. It's around the arts that a lot of things are structured. Rather, for me, than sport or even news, you get your perspective on the news through the arts coverage, and where your issues in society lie is through art as well, I think. So that's why it's always

interested me, to be quite honest. You've got this entertainment aspect to arts, which is part of it, I mean you've got to include that.

I worked for an editor at the time, Wimpie de Klerk, he was FW de Klerk's brother who was editor of *Rapport*. And his policy on the arts was they were read by about three per cent of the readers, but it was an influential three per cent, and he wanted that. He promoted the arts quite a lot. And we found out that it was far more that read the arts pages. So there was a demand for it.

TG: But was this the same, what kind of arts did that newspaper promote?

WP: All of it. Because I worked for an Afrikaans newspaper it was, they were very ... as a matter of fact it was through an Afrikaans newspaper that I first learnt political awareness. A lot of the people who worked there, especially the subs, were very, highly politically aware of what was happening in the country at the time, and they did try to get as much as they could through into the paper. In fact, Wimpie at the time, was fired I think, because he was considered too liberal, although there is this thing at the moment that he wasn't liberal enough as it were. I don't know if you've been following that fight at the moment, which is an Afrikaans issue. But for me personally working there I can say that we covered everything. In fact in my English column I covered a book called *The Soweto I love* by Siphosiphiso Sepamla at the time, which was possession banned in this country, and they had no problems with things like that.

With protest theatre we covered all of that, and at one time for example, PW Botha made a film, well, not PW Botha, but his daughter Rozanne Botha was involved in the film. I can't remember the name. It was one of these American quickies they did out here, and it was financed partly through the army, at the time, under apartheid. We reviewed the film, and exposed where the money came from. When I reviewed it I said everyone who worked on the film under pseudonyms, now because Rozanne Botha was Roz Bot. Somebody called Hennie Human who was at the SABC at the time, was Henry Hyman, and so in my review I disclosed who they were. Another reporter at the time, Herman Jansen, disclosed where the money came from, and the funding, and it was propaganda for Savimbi, basically, cast as an American adventure story.

TG: Was this in the *Mail&Guardian*?

WP: I did the story for *Rapport*. And that weekend we had PW Botha screaming at *Rapport* specifically saying these journalists who are what he called "Winslemer", which is an Afrikaans word for things on the oxwagon which gather muck and dirt and these journalists who spent all week collecting venom and spewing it out on Sunday. So, working for an Afrikaans paper, we were open to things like that. And I think because it was Afrikaans, it's very different to working for an English paper I find. I've been happy to work in both areas. It hurt more because it was from within, if you know what I mean, they expected the English to do that kind of attack, but not the Afrikaans. They had to be part of the lager, as it were. There was definite dissension there.

TG: You worked for several papers?

WP: I worked for the *Weekly Mail* freelance, I'll tell you how it started. I saw Charlotte Bauer, she asked me to write three reviews at the time. Which I did and they liked them, and

she said "alright, you can come and work for us". The *Weekly Mail* was started by Anton Harber and Erwin Manoin, two very brave people, who I think put their pensions into it. It was really wonderful working there. I worked under my own name, and the idea was when the *Weekly Mail* started it was going to be subscribed, and they had so many subscriptions they could actually bring it out on the street as a newspaper for one rand a copy.

Obviously working for the *Weekly Mail*, we knew we were going to get hassled from the police, you knew it was going to be banned, you knew that they were actually going to push you as far as they could. Something, which I was in agreement with, and they were going to employ journalists from other papers. So obviously I had to get permission from Wimpie de Klerk, who was the editor at the time, and he said "I have no problem with you working there". "Any police harassment refer them to me". So I said fine. He said that, just like one favor, could they use my name and say I worked for *Rapport*. *Mail&Guardian* didn't have a problem with that, so if you look at some of the earlier issues, 1985, you'll find that I'm in there as William Pretorius, who's film reviewer for *Rapport* as well.

Then, when the *Weekly Mail* started taking off, the newspaper got a bit cheery about it, so they stopped journalists working on it. At the same time at *Rapport*, Martin Welz, who does *Noseweek* at the moment, was bringing out a little paper called *Nose*, that was totally anti-government. The government was suing him for hundreds of thousands of rands at the time, and my boss then was somebody called Koenie Slabber, who was art editor, and Koenie was totally in agreement with me working at the *Mail&Guardian* as well, or the *Weekly Mail* then. And Koenie called me in one day and said they had a problem because the directorate had made a rule at *Rapport* that nobody could work freelance unless they got permission. So every time you wanted to do a freelance article for somebody else, you had to go and say, could I do it? And obviously they're not going to say yes to the *Mail&Guardian*, or the *Weekly Mail*, so Koenie said "all I need is a memo from you saying that you're not working under your own name"

TG: So that was the reason for Fabius?

WP: That was the reason for Fabius. So I phoned Charlotte and said "look we have a problem. They want to stop everybody, so I can't use my own name". And I had copy in and it appeared that weekend as Fabius Burger. So where they got it from I really have no idea, but I quite like it [laughs].

TG: At the *Weekly Mail*? They were the ones inventing this name?

WP: I worked for two people there basically, it was Charlotte Bauer and Barbara Ludman. I think between the two of them they probably concocted the name [laughs]. That's what I became suddenly and it was like a bit of an open secret. We told everybody, you know, and at *Rapport* my boss there Koenie Slabber knew I working as Fabius Burger. And I presume Wimpie as well, and they had no hassles.

TG: You still work for the *Mail&Guardian*. I saw some film reviews.

WP: I do it occasionally now, mainly as a back-up. They've got Shaun de Waal doing film and Neil Sonnekus. If either of them can't make I preview, I just do a capsule and give it to them.

TG: Do you work other places as well now?

WP: Yes, I'm freelancing totally. I work for an Afrikaans paper called *Beeld*, I do films for them. I have my own website now. Um, it's on *News 24*, on their section *Off Beat*. It's a film web page. They do all the movies every week, 600 words on each, plus a think piece. Which usually, I try to make about the local industry, although sometimes I don't. I back-up at the *Mail&Guardian*, I have a book column in the *Saturday Star* on second hand bookshops in Johannesburg, and book reviews, and then I also back up in *the Star Tonight*, except the *Star Tonight* budget for freelancers has been withdrawn. So, they have problems there [laughs].

TG: How would you define arts journalism?

WP: An arts journalist would be somebody who... That's a very tricky question, basically you have to do a value assessment, which I think sometimes is unfortunate, but it's expected. I'd say somebody who tries to connect things between what's happening in the arts world and what's happening with your reader. There's no just one way of looking at it. When I worked for *Mail&Guardian* and *Rapport*, one was very much involved in what was happening in the country, obviously, at the time. Things have changed, one looks at a lot of American stuff. So I think it's an interesting position to be in here because you can be quite eclectic, you can use theory from Africa, you have access to what is being done here in a way that Americans don't have. And you also have access to American products in a way that Americans don't have, because you're an outsider so you can assess their product very differently. You can look at the ideological aspects of it, sometimes from the entertainment aspect of it ... What I call freewheeling at the moment. But the main thing is to try to connect in various ways.

Obviously, it's a work that becomes in the long run a combination of the objective and the subjective. There are ways of looking at the inner dynamics of a particular work, whether it's a film or a book, and when you put it over you try and make it personalised. One tries to avoid becoming just purely a consumer guide, which is what's expected quite often at newspapers. That is the big danger and at the moment if you look at the way films are going in this country it's like rating them in one out of ten, then why bother to do a review if you are not creating a discourse.

TG: How do you think it has developed since you started in the *Mail&Guardian*, or the *Weekly Mail*? Do you think this, when you're talking about consumerism, has this changed, or is it ...

WP: I think arts coverage in the newspapers does change to an extent, in that the reader profile changes. When the *Weekly Mail* started, everyone had an image of a kind of reader and ours at the time was in Yeoville, one of the trendy Yeoville-ites I suppose you call them, whatever, you could go quite, a bit hip and look outrageous and that. Lately the profile at the *Mail&Guardian* has been more up market, and more on the business side of things, the readers are more into business.

You can still be outrageous I presume, but not in quite the same way. The *Mail&Guardian* still does the liveliest coverage of the arts yet. They are still connecting to the arts in South Africa and you do get discussions of events there, local events, that you don't get in other newspapers. I find for example in the *Beeld*, an Afrikaans newspaper, I get very connected to South Africa where they do a lot of local stuff. Unfortunately there is a tendency now to syndicate the overseas copy here, and I think that's wrong, because we do have reviewers and

we do have arts journalists here, and they should be encouraged. But syndication is the problem here. And also the fact that newspaper editors tend to look at TV and film as your main areas of discussion, which of course mostly are all imported.

TG: It seems like this has increased during the years.

WP: Yes, I would agree with you. I would say that it has increased.

TG: From the more politically funded arts journalism, in the 80s particularly, and today it appears to me to be more consumer friendly, more of a consumerist guide.

WP: Yes, that is the way it has gone. I'd agree with you there... At one time one worked a lot for example, against censorship. When I was at *Rapport* one of my beats were the censors, showing people exactly what they were doing. In that sense, my personal opinion was that the cultural boycott at the time did a lot of damage. I, this is personal opinion, I've been attacked for it. I wrote about it once. Basically, we had economic sanctions, which I could understand, because the government at the time, the apartheid one, wanted money in the country, obviously, so you kept that out. Sports boycott, yes, because there was a lot from sport.

But culture was something that the government then didn't want to provide. They didn't need a review of Siphso Sepamla's *The Soweto I Love*. In fact they had banned possession of the book. And I find that during a cultural boycott, one actually colluded with the censors to a certain extent and did the job for them, which is a time when I felt particularly that poets should have been battering the doors down to come into the country. Attenborough did come in to talk about making *Biko*, but most of the films that we should have made were made out of the country. The films we did make here, I'm thinking of *Dropped Man*, there [were] quite distinct works that were suppressed at the time.

Being a journalist and you had [material] that you could really work with, and try and break down these censor barriers. Those barriers have gone now. Nothing gets banned, basically, except bestiality and child porn, which are not things one will support anyway. So a lot of issues have disappeared, it's quite logical for me that it should turn into that kind of journalism. I do think the greater challenge now is looking beyond that journalism at what is happening culturally in the country. One has this critics breakdown that if it's local, it's no good, kind of thing. Theatre at one time used to be very vibrant, theatre isn't as vibrant as it used to be, but there is still a lot of theatre being done, but nobody is picking it up. If you're talking community theatre, if you're including a lot of it...

TG: How would you say arts journalism is limited to other genres? Newspaper journalistic genres, like news ...

WP: Because we mainly work in newspapers, at the moment I'm working on the Internet, which I find very exciting. I find that newspapers for me could have a problem because if you're looking at this country, the demographics, the newspapers are trying to go all black in a way, which I think one shouldn't, one should have a newspaper just for everybody. I still find it very sad that the media is divided into black and white still, you have the *Sowetan* for the black market, you have a magazine like *YFM* I think it is called, for the black youths, you've got *Epic* for the white youths. And they're like mirror images of the same thing, which I think is something that should have broken down long ago. We're still working with demographics,

still eight per cent of the affluent population have the internet. One should be looking to extending one's reach journalistically and they're not. I think journalists, or newspapers and the media, are looking at niche marketing in the new South Africa. And I find that a trend that is economically viable I presume, but I think culturally it's not a good thing.

TG: What would you say is the difference between arts journalism and let's say news when it comes to subjectivity, objectivity, sources, language - is there a difference?

WP: There is a big difference between getting a news report and writing a review obviously. News is supposed to be objective. I find a lot of news these days a bit sensationalists, which is not a trend I enjoy. What I miss in this country is news, in depth coverage of the news from - how should I say not to sound snobbish - from an intellectual perspective possibly, we get index coverage of the news. The nice part about being an arts journalist is that you do have freedom to develop ideas, providing that you always look for the context of what you are discussing. There is a lot more one can do on arts at the moment, which is not happening.

What I'm finding at the moment with working on the Internet, is a lot of people are still thinking print media whereas the Internet is something that could open up drastically. We have a problem in this country, for example, with libraries which affects me as an arts journalist. We have a high rate of illiteracy, we have a high rate of cultural illiteracy, and we have a high rate of - someone had a very good word for it the other day - saying that if you read it's fine, but if you don't read any good books, you may as well be illiterate. The library budget has been cut to absolutely zero, in Johannesburg, throughout the country, which means they cannot buy new books, they cannot keep ideas circulating in the society - and I do believe they are done through books, through debate, through cultural journalism. The libraries are also looking to extend the Internet. For example, Orange Farm, which is a squatters' camp outside Johannesburg, that's developed into like an informal settlement. If they get a library, and the library can bring in the Internet as well, the library can be very useful in expanding your cultural literacy.

We are working with the fact that the establishments at the moment aren't interested in doing that, and we've got to figure out why. I would think that the first priority should be your health care, which they are doing something about, and education, which is in a bit of a mess, and then your cultural things like supporting the theatres, supporting the arts, supporting the film industry and that. We don't have that. As a journalist you find you are hamstrung by the fact that there isn't much local product. And that the people who should be interested in it, aren't really.

TG: How is arts journalism different in the way of use of the sources, closeness to the sources?

WP: You have an interesting situation where, if you take the theatre, I know a lot of people in the theatre and I can talk to them. It's given me a nice perspective because I can actually watch a performance, I can see how it grows, I can discuss it with the people here. As a matter of fact you have more access to the people who create art here than in, I think you do in America. I mean here one could talk quite informally to any quite well known actor. You couldn't do that to Brat Pitt [laughs] without going through agents and goodness knows what. So the access to people who actually create that art on all levels here is much, much easier, I find.

TG: How would that affect the subjectivity, or trying to be objective?

WP: [That's a] double edged sword, because you can never be too nasty. At the same time, it does give you perspective. For example, if I see people I know informally on stage in a performance, it helps me gauge exactly just how good that performance is because of how different they are to in real life. And you can actually see how they've worked it and how it's working up there. If I didn't know that I couldn't have that comparison. It helps a lot and to see how their ideas develop over the years. I was very friendly with a film director out here called Manie van Rensburg who is now dead unfortunately, but it gave me quite a unique insight into his work. I can look at his films today and understand them much better than had I not known him. But you have to have that ability also to say all right there's a point where I cut off and there's a point where I'm just going to look at that work and discuss that work. And where that work has to talk to me. And I can use what I know, but selectively maybe.

TG: And how would you say that the language you use is different from other genres?

WP: One never thinks about language, you just write. Every newspaper does have a house style, it's a question of space, what you can fit into the space. I worked for *Penthouse* when they started out here, the American movie magazine, as a film columnist and I had 600 words. And I have to use a different kind of language there than if I was doing an in depth article on in books in *Rapport* where I could use an academic language if it was necessary. So one tries to combine the popular language with academic, depending on which publication you're working for.

TG: And the readership?

WP: The *Mail&Guardian* is more up market so you could use a better vocabulary than if you were writing for a down market magazine, where they'd expect you to use adjectives to describe a movie rather than talk about plot, narrative and symbolism in the movie. So it depends what you're working for. I've tried to develop certain styles over the years for the magazines I've been written for. That's been a challenge. You'd try to adjust to your readership and not talk down to them, there's a difference. It's me just talking to them, so they can either take it or leave it in a way. In a very friendly sense. I find working on the Internet - I've developed a different style to working anywhere else. I don't know why. There they encourage certain irreverence. So one goes for it. And also I've done a lot of surfing on the internet to see what is written on the internet and I think it's amazing what's happening out there. You're getting everything from very, very interesting articles that are totally academic to absolute junk.

TG: Ja, you get everything. You don't have that clearly defined audience that you would have ...

WP: Yes, as working in a newspaper, yes.

TG: What is good and what is bad arts journalism?

WP: Good arts journalism, which one tries to do, and doesn't always succeed, is something that creates an interesting debate around the subject that you're discussing where you'd immediately think: "Oh, why didn't I think of that? Oh, yes, I should have thought of that". To try to say something interesting about the object you're discussing and just not to bore the

reader. Bad arts journalism is when you get bogged down in irrelevancies about the subject you're discussing, where the ego comes.

TG: The ego of the writer?

WP: Yes, it's me judging that work in an interesting way. I find that there are two types of arts journalism. Obviously you can make a name for yourself as a celebrity being an arts journalist which is a thing I try to avoid. Because the people who deserve the credit are the people who create the work out there. It doesn't matter how bad it is, they're the one who are putting their necks out. So, good arts journalism tries to work through the thing by trying to make it lively, maybe contentious, [that it] has something to say. People don't like it - it's very interesting if they come back to you. And so good arts journalism does create a discourse that's a two-way discourse about an object and hopefully discovering what the intention was from the creator. Bad arts journalism would be when you get out of bed and say well I heard of this movie, I'll go and see it and leave it with that. I think good arts journalism is very creative, bad arts journalism just gives you opinions without motivation.

TG: So, it has to do with a genuine interest?

WP: Yes, I think so.

TG: And knowledge, maybe.

WP: It's a process of growth. Over the years, I've looked back on all the stuff I've covered, and seen how things have changed obviously.

TG: What goals do arts journalism have?

WP: I don't have any. Maybe just to see what there is out there, and try and understand it for me [is] the most important part of the job. For me still an interesting moment is when I don't know anything about the movie or the play I am going to see. I want to go there open. I have to use my resources to understand. Afterwards I go and do my homework and find out what I must know about it. So, I don't have any specific goals in that way, I think just to be able to create a discourse that's viable for the reader, there's a variety of readers, you just hope that some of the readers find it interesting. It's the best one can do [laughs].

TG: But for arts journalism in general? Do you think it should have [goals]?

WP: In general, yes. I think the only objective one could have was to do something immediately, working with the current, work on what's on now. Academic assessments are different, and they have time, they'll have space. And also, to try and be informed about you subject. I find that if you're discussing movies, to specialise in particular subjects is very difficult for... I know of a case of somebody in film who didn't know what the Sundance film festival was, and then you got to say hold on, I mean, how can you write a film review that is interesting. I don't do a lot of homework, but one must keep informed about the subjects and how it works, how the media works. If you're doing books it's not the same at all, if you're doing TV, it's not the same, if you're looking at comics it's not the same as a novel. You just have to get to know the medium that you are discussing thoroughly, that is your main object.

TG: What would you say is the relation between politics and arts journalism? And I am specifically thinking of South Africa.

WP: Yes, let's look at the history. Obviously at one time it was very clear cut. You had apartheid, you were against it. So the relationship there was very strong. Now the relationship is less strong, because you have - as a journalist it is a much more open society. It's much more relaxed environment to work [in], your problems I think would be that you'll crash with your editor possibly and there's always that in a newspaper. I can't talk about that at the moment, because I freelance, so I'm not involved [in] these issues. The political issues have become different, and it's like, one would see Mbeki as anti-press at the moment, which is similar to P.W Botha [who] didn't like the press, so we're still working in that kind of environment.

TG: But I am thinking about what you chose to write about, if that has some political motivation behind it?

WP: You mean aesthetics and politics? Yes, I find at the moment, theory, at least the one I've read from overseas to try and keep up that personal, there's a lot of gender issues which is quite interesting, gay issues which is quite interesting. I can't approach that out of that angle now, rather than deliberately political, but the school is there in the back of one's brain. But the political aspect of art, one tries to keep it open, because if you want to find politics in a movie, you can, but it's not going to be politics that is relevant to South Africa. I think it is easy if you discuss some South African product, and not many people are doing highly political art - you're getting the gender art. There is this guy who circumcised himself on TV as an art exhibition. At the moment there is more gender politics rather than old-fashioned politics of the oppression. You don't have protest theatre anymore. The theatre you get is the community theatre. You're getting theatre about aids. So, the issues in society become more social in a much broader way than in the old days. Then you had the suppression, the apartheid was there, you had banned political parties. Now, political parties aren't really banned, so you got AWB [laughs].

TG: But how was it in the 80s, when you talk about the arts journalism in the *Mail&Guardian*, was it politically motivated?

WP: I would say yes. If you wrote anything in the 80s as an arts journalist, it was politically motivated, because you were working in this pressured atmosphere, so anything that [took] you away from a political arena was in a way a bit self-indulgent. You always have to remember that not all art is politics, art has its aesthetic autonomy, which one also try to keep, but that aesthetic autonomy was difficult to keep in a situation [where] we had political suppression. We had a dreadful censorship system that wasn't at all interested in aesthetics, that would ban everything from key-rings to people. So it was a different atmosphere. Now the aesthetics has become stronger. You can look at art in an aesthetic way, working in South Africa now, you're open to a lot of different influences, like post-modernism, like aesthetic works, and a political way if you want, yes of course. The politics is about social issues roughly, it is the politics of aids. For me personally as a journalist I wouldn't like to go back to the old years at all. It's more freedom now.

TG: Do you find arts journalism important?

WP: This is Manie van Rensburg, the director I was very friendly with. This one I did because there was a lot of tension behind the scene in van Rensburg's film. Then also Manie at the time was black-listed. He went overseas to meet the ANC. The *Weekly Mail* was the only newspaper that was prepared to put the whole story in, and that was great.

TG: Is this good arts journalism?

WP: Well, I hope it does put a hanger on the form that people would look at the film and understand it a little better and understand what it is doing. It is certainly not the only way of looking at the film, but yes, I think it is a very valid way. This is part of what arts journalism is all about. It is exposing what is going on behind the scenes. And those were the hideous days of the *Mail&Guardian*, we used to do that. Take the chances, things like that.

TG: Did you get any responses? I don't know if you remember that article specifically, but maybe more in general?

WP: One doesn't get a lot of responses to an article, interesting in this country, I must be honest. The only responses I ever got to articles was when in *Rapport* [I wrote] that I enjoyed a film and somebody would send me a whole lot of religious pamphlets saying it's a sin to enjoy a film, then I enjoyed it even more. Yes, it did help Manie I think. [New article] This one was Stephen Gray. This is what I call a tendency article. I enjoy doing that, because I think journalism should take, not take sides, but highlight pros and cons.

TG: Was it also motivated by a general, or a wish to promote, your title is quite biased...

WP: Yes, [laughs] indeed.

TG: Who chose to write about this?

WP: How does that process work? Because I knew Manie van Rensburg, Manie phoned me up and said he was very unhappy to what was happening to *The Third Reich*, would I be interested to talk to him about it. So, I went and spoke to him and I thought yes, this is worth doing. A journalist is only as good as his contacts. You do need contacts in the industry.

[...]

TG: How do you experience arts journalism is being perceived by the other journalists and editors in the *Mail&Guardian*?

WP: The *Mail&Guardian* is one of the few papers where I think it is considered and taken seriously. You'll find that the newspapers sell on sport and sensationalism and sensationalised news stories on crime, so those are considered more important.

[...]

WP: Arts journalism is also a valuable record of how things work in this country. One of the things in doing theatre for me - I did theatre for several years - I found it being a valuable record to see how this country developed through theatre. It was our interpretation of overseas plays as well as how actors talked about the country they lived in through plays, and now

nobody goes to the theatre anymore. So the editors say, "it is a minority audience, so why should we have it". Everybody goes to soccer, soccer is the main thing, so they rather give space to soccer than theatre. Now we have to look at exactly why people aren't going to the theatre, what's happened there. Why the arts are loosing the grip on [people's] imagination. I have various theories about that.

TG: Let me hear.

WP: Well, because we have 18 million of the population that are never near a theatre, never near a cinema, never near a video-shop, never near any cultural [event] whatsoever, and never near a library. So, what do they expect?

TG: But they didn't use to live near it either.

WP: No. But at that stage we had a bigger white population, who has immigrated, that used to attend the arts. The arts were kept artificially alive. And what's happened is now, that artificiality is gone. The arts have to find their own feet, which I think is both fascinating and exciting, but it needs a lot more support and a lot more thought and a lot more encouragement. And to close down the arts section in the newspapers at this particular moment is wrong, because this particular moment, the arts could become what South African. Where you are going to get cross-over, where you're overseas art is more meaningful than they used to be, because what people can have access to, or theoretically should have access to. It's quite complex. For me as a journalist, I try to reflect this [what is happening on the arts scene in South Africa]. But where?

**INTERVIEW WITH PAT SCHWARTZ, PARKTOWN, JOHANNESBURG
3.11.2000**

**Previously freelance arts journalist for the *Weekly Mail/Mail&Guardian*
Presently director of The University of Witwatersrand Press and writes occasionally for
the *Mail&Guardian***

PAT SCHWARTZ (PS): Here I am responsible for a very extensive drama list, we publish play scripts, practically the only people in South Africa who do now. I wrote the introduction to a collection of Barney Simon's work. It was published after he died.

TERESA GROGAN (TG): How long have you been here?

PS: I've been director for just over two years.

TG: How would you define art journalism?

PS: I'm not sure I would define art journalism [laughs]. Well, ideally art journalism would broadly cover everything in the field of art, dance, theatre, graphic art, music, and I don't think South African art journalism comes anywhere near doing any of that. One hardly reads about music at all, the very fact that we could actually kill off one orchestra after another in this country for lack of funding, not for lack of audiences. We just murdered a ballet company, I just don't think of South Africa cares enough about the arts at all. And for graphic arts I don't see any coverage at all. The exhibitions are not reviewed, the Johannesburg Art Gallery as far as I know is also dwindling away for lack of funding.

TG: Why do you think that is so?

PS: I think there are two reasons, well there are a lot of reasons I suppose. One of them is that the vast majority of the South African population is busy trying to find enough bread to put into their family's mouth, and can't possibly afford tickets. I want to go back on that, because in the days when we were involved with union artists, we used to take shows to the townships, and I'm talking about the early seventies, very early seventies. You would go out to the townships with a show and would have to fight people off. They didn't charge very much, and there were these terrible halls, I mean there was no such thing as a theatre, there still isn't a theatre as far as I know anywhere in the townships. There are these draughty communal halls where if it rained, the rain was interrupting your performance virtually, because you couldn't hear. There was a passion for the theatre. You just couldn't have enough chairs. Barney Simon used to describe the way people would start off sitting in rows and then gradually the chairs would kind of move forward. And there was always participation, it was never a people on stage and people in the audience. There was interaction, you still see it at the Market sometimes. That was in the days when people really didn't have any money, but they would put aside a little bit for the theatre.

I don't know what the answer is to why there is dwindling audiences and a dwindling readership. I think part of it is that there is a dwindling literacy. People don't read about it, and if people don't read about it there is no point in writing about it. I think part of it has to do with a lot of emigration. A lot of people who supported the arts have gone, and therefore

would have supported a publication. There were two publications devoted entirely to the arts, there was *Scenaria*, and there was *Arabesque*, which was totally dance, and both of those have died. I think people are less interested, and right now I think that what's being done in theatre is less interesting. I think we're suffering from a post-apartheid inability to find themes that involve people, and consequently a lot of what used to be so exciting about South African theatre pre-apartheid doesn't exist any more. That's my ruling on it. Also there's a kind of a lack lustre. South African journalism is at its lowest level ever. The quality of the journalism is so poor.

TG: Are you talking generally?

PS: I'm talking generally, but I see the sorts of people who come to our book launches and the kind of stuff they write afterwards, it is so bad. The quality of reviews by and large of books, is really very indifferent and the quality of review of theatre, with a few exceptions is abysmal. It's chicken and egg, I don't know whether people are writing less well because the audience is less interested, or the audience is less interested because the quality is so poor. I go abroad and I read the quality of reviews across the board, books, art, whatever, in the British newspapers, I want to cry, you know, I don't know which came first. The lack of interest, or the lack of quality. I don't think it is very bad in the *Mail & Guardian*, and the *Weekly Mail*. They had fine people writing for them. They still probably are amongst the best, but nothing special.

TG: What would you say is good and what is bad arts journalism?

PS: I think *Tonight*, aside from Adrienne Sichel, is bad journalism. Very bad, poor quality, [except] when she writes, but I'm not sure she writes so much anymore. I think that by and large, the quality of what one reads in *Tonight*, which is probably what more people look to for their guidance than any other, aside from the *Sunday Times* which, as you know, hardly reviews the theatre at all, it's Barry Ronge on the movies and that's it. And they hardly review books at all now, I don't read very broadly these days, but I certainly would define *Tonight* as bad art journalism, apart from Adrienne who's knowledge of dance is probably unparalleled in the country.

TG: What makes it bad?

PS: It is shallow, it doesn't draw on any depth or knowledge of the history. There was a man called Raeford Daniel who also wrote performance. His knowledge of theatre and film was just encyclopaedic. There was nothing he couldn't remember, there was no source he couldn't draw on. All the good writers are dead. The people who really had a history. People now don't bother, they really have no point of reference, they haven't travelled, they haven't seen theatre abroad or film abroad, or anything else abroad, consequently the whole scene is lacking a foundation basically. And a foundation makes for good art writing.

TG: Did art critics in the eighties, did they have the experience...?

PS: I think the people I have mentioned certainly did, they were all people who had travelled and they knew what was going on in theatre in the world. They had a basis for comparison, I think very much so, and I don't think anybody really reads anymore. I don't think people could cite Ibsen or, you know, Shakespeare because they simply aren't educated to do so. There seems to be a general feeling that anybody who walks into a theatre can review a play.

Now to some extent this is true, because if you are talking to an audience, the bulk of your audience is uneducated too. So yes, you do want people who can talk to people who don't know, but I don't think that means you have got to be ignorant in order to do it. And I feel [this is the case] across the board in arts reporting. There are obviously exceptions, I mean Shaun de Waal is a fine writer and a fine reviewer, but there are not too many of him around.

TG: What goals do arts journalists have?

PS: I don't think there are any in these days. If I look back I think that the object of arts journalism in its heyday was to inform, to enthuse people about the arts. To make them want to go and see that painting, hear that musician, develop an interest in theatre. I think there was quite a drive, certainly, in the 70s and 80s, to develop a South African theatre. A fine South African theatre, and to make people interested in it. I'm not saying everyone was perfect or everyone was a missionary, but the fact is that people cared much more about the product, about the values, about production values, and I think they wanted people to love theatre in order to encourage a theatre culture. I really have to talk mostly about theatre and dance, because those are the two areas that I was interested in. I don't know too much about graphic art. But I really do think that there was a kind of mission to inform and I'm not sure if that is the case anymore.

TG: What is the relation between politics and arts journalism?

PS: I think that people are tired of apartheid themes. The writers are searching for a place to go. That playwright who also died a couple of years ago... He said to me years ago, "when I can write about people being born and people dying and people getting married, I'll know that we live in a normal country". I think there is a strive to stop writing about political issues, and try and get into the sort of theatre that the world has known, when you write about people.

TG: But seen in relation to what we choose to write about?

PS: Well, what do people write about? If you're looking at things like the mass media, like *The Star*, they're writing to sell newspapers. They're writing down to the lowest common denominator so they write about *Isidingo* and pop stars, and nobody bothers to go and find out about the more obscure and [what] the more interesting people are doing. You don't see that at all anymore. If you page through something like *Tonight*, I mean I page through it because there's nothing to actually stop and read, because they are writing, mostly writing about television people, soap operas and the odd pop star who happens to come along.

TG: How was that before?

PS: Before they were looking at what the more in-depth people were doing, both the writers and the performers. There are people who are doing that. Robert Greig does it, the *Sunday Independent* is probably the other exception, it is trying to do something a little more intellectual and a little more interesting. But by and large really nobody is actually going out and writing, I can't remember when I last read an in-depth article in any South African newspaper on the state of South African theatre. I go to much less theatre than I used to because I find... I look around and I can't find anything I want to see.

TG: We wanted to go and see a show at the Market Theatre yesterday, but it was cancelled, because there was nobody...

PS: It's very sad, but you know I go to the Market Theatre as often as I can obviously, but by and large there's not a lot happening here that I want to see. And that again is the chicken and egg thing, are people not writing about it, because there is nothing interesting to write about? Do we have a dwindling interest in theatre because we just have dwindling themes? It's so depressing.

TG: What do you think are the main hindrances to good arts journalism?

PS: As I said I think it's partly a lack of material and partly a lack of talent.

TG: Is arts journalism important?

PS: Yes, it is! A country, which doesn't have a vibrant culture, is one-dimensional. If all you are worrying about, and of course the major things you have to worry about are AIDS, and hunger and poverty and those negatives, but part of the quality of life, real quality of life, if you're going to offer people something a little bit beyond that, you've got to have a vibrant arts culture. And you know, if we look further north, the dance, the incredible dance that is coming out of, you know, places like Zimbabwe or - in fact I suppose that's the one area in South Africa that still striving is dance, not ballet, but dance. There are companies doing wonderful things and there are quite good people writing about it, but that's it. You know we are just not producing the words and think people have to, it's like never having jam on your bread and butter I suppose. Culture is a sign of a healthy society, I think.

I think a country, where [a] lot of people are very wealthy, which cannot sustain an orchestra - There is something really awful to be said about that. For this, which is probably one of the richest areas of Africa, the PWV area, to not have a ballet company, or an opera company, is appalling and tragic, because just as people were beginning to move in, just as we were beginning to get black kids into a ballet school, they closed it down. I was in an interview with somebody just the other day, saying, well what do we tell the youngsters now, where do they go, do I have to go abroad now, because it's the only place I can dance. And once you've done it, once you've closed these things down, to build them up again is almost impossible. It's a lack of commitment by many of the journalists to actually getting out there and whipping up the masses.

TG: What is the relation between entertainment and the arts?

PS: That is interesting. I mean, I am not a snob about it. I think that if you can draw people into the idea of theatre, if you take someone like an extraordinary phenomenon, Tim Plewman, what is it called...*Defending the Caveman*; one man show, who has been running now on and off for over two years or something. Now, there are people going to see Tim Plewman on stage who have never been to a theatre before, and I know, because I know my daughter's generation, she grew up going to the theatre from the time she was three years old. But she has friends and boyfriends who have never been into a theatre, because their parents have never been into a theatre. And this man has managed to pull people into the theatre and they come back and think: "Well that's not bad, let's go see Shakespeare". If Paul Slabolepszy with his rugby play can draw an audience who has never walked into a theatre doors before, good luck to him. I might not enjoy it, but if somebody else does, [they] think theatre's an okay thing to do, great and so I think it's pretty much the arts are meant to entertain. I mean you wouldn't get me into a pop concert in a million years, and it does

distress me that youngsters will spend hundreds of rand going to some pop concert and won't spend R20 or R30 to go to the ballet or whatever. It's sad. But I think they fall into one another. The importance of the arts is that they have to entertain. Shakespeare entertained... The really good theatre that you will see on the West End or Broadway, just theatre, entertains. It doesn't have to send you out feeling as if you've been dragged through the bushes. If you think of people like Arthur Miller, they inform and entertain.

TG: What would you say is the difference between arts journalism and other genres in terms of subjectivity/objectivity?

PS: I think art journalism is highly subjective. If you're doing a feature on South African art, you have to be more objective, you've got to bring in different opinions. But otherwise it's totally subjective, it's what you like, it's what you think of as being good. That is obvious, that comes back to my feeling that you [got to know the] basic, you've got to have standards of comparisons; "I don't like that particular play or the way that particular play was directed. However, it is important in the light of", not just: "Oh that's a lousy play, I didn't enjoy it". That's not critical art.

I think South Africa newspapers are all totally subjective. I don't think news reporting is objective these days either. I can't bear it. I grew up in a school which said you always get the other side, and that opinions have no place on the news pages or any other pages, they only have a place on the leader pages. I came from a very strict school, which did not allow opinions, the personal opinion of a journalist to intrude on you. The fact is that when you get a story you go get the other side, you should actually make an effort to get some answer, whereas these days you really don't. And also, there was a time when you were allowed to knock sacred cows, you know. Even if you were on the *Rand Daily Mail* and you supported the Council of Churches or University of whatever it was. If they did something wrong you reported it, there was no way you just ignored it. And the only newspaper that does that, I think the only newspaper that does that, is the *Mail&Guardian*. Everybody else is too frightened. I do think it is a tragedy.

TG: How about use of sources and closeness to the sources.

PS: That's always been the problem of the South African society. It's a very incestuous society and there's no question about it. If you are having dinner with the director after the performance, your review is going to be different from if you don't know him at all. It's always been a problem, there's always been criticisms of certain people, snuggling up to certain other people. In my book reviews for instance, I would try and be kinder to South African writers, try not to be so harsh on South African writers as I would be on a book from abroad where, you know, where it really didn't matter to them. Probably, just out of a sense of nurturing, trying to be more constructive. I could be vitriolic about the Margaret Drabble [book], it really didn't matter to Margaret Drabble. To me to joke about Coetzee in the early days would have been different, so I would try and be more constructive I suppose, really. And that's one thing that actually nurturing certain directors or certain actors because you... There was an interchange, I think.

TG: How did you manage that [to keep a distance to your sources]?

PS: Precisely because I didn't have the background to do it. Every now and again, they said: "Please, there's nobody else to do this", and I would be very tentative about it. But then, if I didn't like it, I said so. But I'd try and find out why I didn't like it.

TG: Is there something specific about arts journalism's language?

PS: Yes, I think one's entitled to assume a level of knowledge in arts journalism, if one doesn't, then one's writing in news story form. One is entitled to use slightly more intellectual language. However, again that's where I think it's to be completely obscured. I believe in the books that I publish, language is concerned with explaining, not to obfuscating. I will occasionally read something Robert Greig writes, I haven't got a clue what he's trying to say. And that's okay. I don't think you can blind people with [difficult language]. You've got to use a language that's actually comprehensible. For the people who are likely to go and see that play or go to the dance.

TG: And in terms of readership. Are the people who read the arts section different than the people who read the news?

PS: This is why I think that *Tonight* is so appalling, because basically it has decided that its readership is the teeny bopper - average standard eight education. If that's what it is appealing to, it's not appealing to people beyond that. If you are writing about Ninja Turtles, you write in a certain language, if you're writing about Ibsen then you'll write in a different language, because the people have their different level of understanding, and you're entitled to assume that. But there should be a mix, you shouldn't decide to write down or to write up, you've got to see your potential. You've got the guys coming in from Soweto who probably don't have a matric, and you've got the northern suburbs, you know, highly educated, University educated executives also coming, you've got to find some language that is going to speak to all of them. And I think it was done in those days, I really do think you could read reviews in those days and know what it was you were going to see. I don't think they do that anymore. In fact what people are doing these days is telling the story. You so rarely read a review that actually assesses the production value, the input of the director, the lighting... You don't see it anymore.

TG: I have copied your articles, and if you could have a look at them and uh... give some comments on them in relation to what we've been talking about.

PS: Past comes back to haunt me... Goodness. What sort of comments do you want on it?

TG: In relation to what we talked about. What arts journalism is, what the goals are.

PS: Well, this very much was just a personality profile, more than anything else. I don't think it says very much at all except about Ellen Gillian. The object was just to highlight somebody who has taken over. I don't think I was there for more than about ten minutes actually, I've almost forgotten she was the general manager.

TG: Why did you choose to write about [her]?

PS: I probably would have done it just to get the Market Theatre mentioned. Which is what I did. If I could do something where I could mention the Market Theatre, I would. I tried to clear the case. It's quite a sort of flimsy profile. She was quite a flimsy person basically, you

know and an in-depth - I did an interview with Barney Simon, which was had much more penetrating look at what theatre meant. And she'd just arrived, she was Scots, she didn't come from a South African country at all, and basically I was trying to find out who she was and what she was doing here.

Now the Mary Benson [interview] - she died a few months ago and she was a very close friend of mine since the first time I ever met her. Funny that you should pick this particular one. We were just trying to bring to people's knowledge what South Africa lost when they banned exiled people like Mary Benson. And the kind of quality of the person she was, and what she had contributed to this country and had continued to contribute to the country from her exile with her writing, her work. This was a much more in-depth, important piece of writing I think. It meant something to me, the other one I think, I did a lot of very frivolous stuff, I enjoyed it. I like writing about people, I don't care what they do really. Now Mary, this for me was a very moving thing, there was this woman I had heard about, I'd read her work, there was no way before 1990 anyone could interview her. She was a non-person as far as the country was concerned.

TG: Did she move back in 1990?

PS: No, she never moved back. Because she was totally crippled with arthritis and was very poor and was no way she could have survived, or go out socially had she moved back to a non-national health environment. So basically it was her illness which kept her out of the country. But she came, she was the most unbelievable woman, and she was so crippled that you had to cut the food for her, if she had a meat dish she couldn't hold a knife and fork enough to cut it for herself. But she worked, she travelled extensively, there was nowhere she didn't go, she went to the theatre, she went out to the country, she saw everybody, couldn't keep away from a social event, she was the most remarkable woman. And that was my first meeting with her, we fell in love with one another and became very close friends. What I was trying to do here was write about the contribution of a very important writer, to South Africa, and yeah, the loss.

TG: It wasn't gender-related choice [to write about her]?

PS: No, I don't think so. I just couldn't do that. People are important because they are important. I just happen to think that there are probably more remarkable women in South Africa than there are remarkable men, that's the way it is. I think that women are more remarkable than men in a lot of ways, but I never actively sought women.