

THE PIETERMARITZBURG COMMUNITY ARTS PROJECT: -

USING CULTURE AS A WEAPON FOR SELF-EMPOWERMENT AND MOBILISATION

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis documents and presents a critical study of an adversary tradition of culture in South Africa. Through a detailed study of the Pietermaritzburg Community Arts Project, analysing cultural activities developed in opposition to established forms, themes and techniques, the writer documents the growth and development of a concept of popular culture which posits conscious cultural challenges to white hegemony as well as the conventional notion of bourgeois culture of, for example , "going to the theataah." (Tomaselli, 1987 :2)

In addition, this thesis explores the potential of culture as a weapon in the liberation struggle in South Africa, in terms of mobilising and conscientising people.

Chapter One focuses on the theoretical framework, rationalising salient features of contemporary materialist critical theory. The chapter goes on to posit a critical strategy which analyses the discourses of culture in relation to ideology.

Chapter Two tackles the problem of 'cultural hegemony,' using the Gramscian concept of hegemony, where the ruling classes are able to induce the masses to consent to their subordination.

Chapter Two is also a discussion of the much contested question of a "working class culture" . We have seen , for example, that opera and poetry as specific facets of culture have often been

dismissed as a ruling class indulgence (German, 1991 :12). Yet the relationship between culture and class is rather complex. Nor is it one that socialists can afford to ignore. Questions of culture have often been central to revolutionary politics. Hence Chapter Two will explore the Marxist tradition in attempting to ascertain whether there is such a thing as a specific working class culture. In particular, the ideas and writings of Leon Trotsky will be heavily drawn upon when debating the question.

Chapter Three provides an historical overview of the Pietermaritzburg Community Arts Project, and explicates the modus operandi of the project. A brief consideration is also provided of two other cultural projects that have been singled out for mention as they are of particular significance to this study. This chapter also provides an analysis of the actual study conducted. Here the methodology , findings and results will be discussed.

Finally , Chapter Four summarises the preceding sections and attempt to arrive at certain conclusions.

This thesis attempts to contribute to the advancement of cultural studies in South Africa by focusing on a particular cultural project that is currently in operation in Pietermaritzburg. This thesis also shows that historians , social scientists as well as political activists can benefit by supplementing their work

with some knowledge of the manner in which culture is linked both to social consciousness and strategies of resistance in a country where normal channels of communication have long been suppressed.

Marxism has won its historic significance as the ideology of the revolutionary proletariat because , far from rejecting the most valuable achievements of the bourgeois epoch, it has , on the contrary, assimilated and refashioned everything of value in the more than two thousand years of the development of human thought and culture.

V.I Lenin. Draft Resolution to the Proletcult Congress, October , 1920

A situation such as that existing in southern Africa compels the black artist to use all avenues available to him in expressing the black experience, and whether it be autobiographically, sociologically, dramatically, poetically or otherwise, is not so important. What is of vital importance is that the black artist , in particular the writer has a purpose. And that his writings have a role to play in the black man's life. It is history in the making. This time it is a cultural history penned down by the black man himself.

Mothobi Mutloatse. Forced Landing

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to all those comrades who have given their life and limb for the cause of building a just and democratic society, free from the shackles of oppression and exploitation and who are the unsung heroes of our struggle.
Dulce et decorum est. Pro patria mori.

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PREFACE

It was said in ancient times, that the goddess Minerva's knowledge was obtained from an owl who, after sunset, flew through the night collecting information about what had happened during the day. Since Philosophy starts its reflections only after history has accomplished its work, Hegel declared the owl of Minerva to be its heraldic animal.

Can the same be said of this thesis? Is it reflecting on a world which already belongs to the past ? Have all the cultural struggles that have been waged, succeeded in their ultimate goal of bringing to the fore a " new peoples" culture, that is, a reflection of the exploitation and the oppression of the producers of our society; or is this just the beginning for the many "alternative" cultural groups present in terms of continuing the struggle to put forward an alternate cultural forum within the country ?

Against such questions, the writer insists that this thesis be read and understood within the framework of the apartheid - capitalist society in which we operate. Since this study will also focus on the much contested debate about the existence of a 'working class' culture , it must be understood at the very outset that the writer does not ascribe to the view which puts forward the argument that the working class is an

undifferentiated and homogeneous entity, thereby assuming a homogeneous totality.

This thesis , then , is not just another Marxist view of culture, but hopefully will assist in contributing to a new analytic framework which is currently in vogue - one that believes that culture is not a homogeneous field, but a process resulting from the interaction of heterogeneous and often antagonistic forces following different operating logics.

While many of the sources consulted during the research process re quite recent publications, others date back to a period when there was a revival of Marxist theoretical debate, resulting in a paradigm which was often that of a radicalised critical theory combined with an economistic reading of Marx. Politics, ideology and culture were "derived" from economic forms and at the end of the 1970's, a new wave of culturalism and studies of ideology arose.

Perhaps the shape of this thesis can best be explained by way of a commentary on the intellectual biography of Raymond Williams. Writing in 1958, Williams, surveying the work of the Marxist cultural critic of the 1930's, Christopher Cauldwell, indicated that the debate as to whether or not Cauldwell's work could be regarded as authentically Marxist was a 'quarrel which one who is not a Marxist will not attempt to resolve' (Williams 1963 : 269).

In fact , throughout Culture and Materialism, Williams is careful to distance himself from Marxism, a valued tradition, yes, but not one within which Williams himself was willing to locate his own work. By contrast , Williams forcefully states in the introduction to Marxism and Literature, that the thesis of cultural materialism developed in that book

its specific field it is, in spite of and even because of the relative unfamiliarity of some of its elements, part of what I see as the central thinking of Marxism.' (Williams 1977 : pp 5-6)

This obviously represented a significant shift on Williams part in that it was the first time he was willing publicly to nail his colours firmly to the Marxist tradition. In reality, however, this shift is less explicable with regard to the changes in Williams' own concerns and theoretical orientations than to the changes in the internal composition and structure of Marxism. The Marxism from which Williams was so anxious to dissociate himself in the 1950's in so far as questions of culture were concerned, was characterized by an extreme form of economic reductionism. Culture, within Marx and Engel's paradigm , was merely the 'superstructure' erected upon, determined by, and seemingly, having little impact on the economic 'base' of society.

Fortunately, during the intervening period, that aspect of Marxist theory concerned with questions of culture and ideology has been intensively reworked resulting in extreme reductionist

formulations being deeply buried. Today, the central questions concern not whether culture and ideology should be regarded as 'relatively autonomous' in relation to economic processes, but rather, contemporary debates focus much more closely on the precise ways in which this relative autonomy might be conceived and accounted for. The stress that had previously been placed on the determination of culture has been displaced , with the emphasis now falling more clearly on the action of culture, on the view of culture as a practice which relates interactively with economic and political forces and processes , shaping and conditioning these as well as being shaped and conditioned by them. Of course, this tradition later became known as 'culturalism', with the stress placed on the making of culture rather than on its determined conditions.

This perspective was complemented in the late 1960's by the works of Georg Lukacs and Lucien Goldmann , which, although in a language that owed much to Hegel and Marx, offered related ways of accounting for the relative autonomy of culture. Cutting against both of these traditions, however, the influence of structuralism has , over the same period , suggested alternative and opposing ways of conceiving and accounting for this relative autonomy of culture and ideology. Some of the thinkers grouped together under this heading include Levi Strauss in Anthropology; Roland Barthes in Literary Criticism, Jacques Lacan in Psychoanalysis, Michael Foucault in the History of the Sciences,

and, interestingly, all of them have at one time or another furiously repudiated the label. Nevertheless, the term has value if used in a qualified way to refer to a broadly based and, in some respects , radically heterogeneous intellectual tradition . which owes its ' complex unity' from the degree to which the different strands within it, owe a shared indebtedness to the pioneering work of Ferdinand de Saussure in the field of linguistics. .

The work of Antonio Gramsci, and his exposition of the concept of differences between structuralism and culturalism might be bypassed to yield a way of posing questions concerning the relations between cultural, economic and political processes. Moreover, whilst retaining elements of both, it would also correct their polemical and one -sided excesses. If, as Stuart Hall intimates, cultural studies are currently poised to enter into a post-structuralist, post-culturalist phase, recasting the terms of the debate by integrating both perspectives within a new synthesis, it is likely that Gramsci's work will provide a meeting place at which that synthesis will be forged. (Bennet et al 1989:37)

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Except where the contrary is acknowledged this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted to another university.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

CULTURE AND SOCIETY - TOWARDS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

SCOPE AND INTENTIONS

Critical theory has, in recent times, become something of a catchphrase very much in vogue. Studies in various disciplines - the arts , humanities, as well as the social sciences - have undergone dramatic changes as a result of developments in critical philosophy. Cultural studies are becoming the focus of radical reconceptualisation. As Steadman (1985 : 1) states,

Criticism can no longer be seen as providing neutral, value-free methods of assessing significance in cultural expression- criticism is a conscious practice in society and as a result , ascribes ideological positions and is never an objective 'science' for the elucidation of meaning. (Steadman, 1985: 1)

Because no investigation of cultural activity is value-free, it becomes crucial for scholars to assess rigorously the methodology used in any study. Linked directly to this is the particular class position of the scholar. Thus there is also the author's political position to take into consideration. Here the words of Trotsky are incisive,

There remains the question of the political position of the author, who stands as a historian upon the same viewpoint upon which he stood as a participant in the events. The reader , of course, is not obliged to share the political views of the author, which the latter on

his side has no reason to conceal. But the reader does have the right to demand that a historical work should not be the defense of a political position, but an internally well-founded portrayal of the actual process of the revolution. A historical work only then completely fulfills its mission when events unfold upon its pages in their full natural necessity. (Trotsky, 1932 :xx)

This study, then, undertakes an investigation of the Pietermaritzburg Community Arts Project according to certain critical and theoretical strategies. The intention is fourfold :

- 1) To investigate the reasons for the survival of this project in the light of the many obstacles encountered - lack of funding, the township violence etc.;
- 2) To evaluate the extent to which this cultural project has been successful in empowering and conscientising the participants;
- 3) To illustrate the degree to which socio-political factors provided material and ideological determinants in the creation of their cultural activities ie that there is indeed a correlation between the content of the cultural activities and the direct experiences of people in the townships.
- 4) To contribute by means of this study to current theoretical debates in the area of cultural studies.

The writer has been overawed as well as overwhelmed during the course of researching this study because of the number of other theses which embrace similar material. The consequence of this is

that this work is by no means new, pathbreaking or unique. Although works by Coplan (1980), McLaren (1980) and Steadman (1985), undertake studies of theatrical performance in contemporary urban contexts in South Africa, they also undertake a critical view of culture in our society and demonstrate their awareness of the relations between politics, economics and ideology in contemporary cultural expression.

The peculiarity of South Africa's social formation demands, of necessity that any investigation into the sphere of culture be based upon an analysis of the complex relationship between cultural expression and factors of race , class and ideology. Hence the necessity of Marxist theoretical practise . At present, within the traditional alliances that have characterised South African politics and class formation, fundamental shifts are gaining momentum. Class alliances and hegemonic relationships that have existed at various levels of the social formation and have undergone partial re-definition in the past , are now entering a period of radical transformation and reconstitution.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the shift towards black working class hegemony in the traditional alliances of South African resistance politics and in the labour movement in the country. This urgency places a requirement upon Marxist theoretical practice to clarify the relations of hegemony operant in the social formation and in the ideological categories and

concepts that cement and express those formations. Marxist practise has a task in the present conjuncture to extend its practice beyond the mere development of bodies of concepts and formulations of methodologies, to intervening in the relations of cultural hegemony , by sorting theoretically through the cultural forms which give expression to class relations, to identify clearly the historical place of the working class , its culture and perspectives in those relations, and the relations of class hegemony that define the dominant ideological formation.

The struggle to organise , define and create a political, economic and cultural dominance of the working class in South Africa, occurs at various levels and regions of practise. Academic theoretical practice forms but one strand in this complex process which nevertheless is significant, since the rewriting of histories and other knowledge is crucial to building the theoretical and cultural components of working class struggle in South Africa.

TOWARDS A CRITICAL THEORY

Introduction

The 1980's have witnessed growing turbulence in South Africa as the state and popular opposition jockeyed over a redistribution of political power. This period in particular , has witnessed tremendous social , political as well as economic upheaval in the

country. The 1984-86 uprising saw a heightened resistance emerging even in the face of intensified state repression. There was an increased mobilisation of the masses and the struggle took on many forms. One of these forms - cultural activity - is the subject of exploration in this study. Indeed, with the rise of alternate forms of culture in the townships, there has been a shift in the conception of 'culture' and this, of course, has generated re-definitions of the dominant paradigm and a search for new approaches. This study will root its discussion in a materialist approach in its attempt to elucidate key concepts.

KEY CONCEPTS IN A MATERIALIST ANALYSIS

Culture - Towards a definition

The concept of culture is highly problematic. For some it is exemplified by "doing" , for example, attending the opera or theatre; whilst for others it is relegated to non-political aspects of what Tomaselli refers to as Afrikaaner Nationalism.

In its volkekunde guise, culture has been corrupted into a pseudo-scientific justification for apartheid and racial prejudice in general. This is a far cry from Edward Taylor's original definition on which anthropology is built : " that complex whole which includes knowledge, art, belief, morals, law , custom and capabilities acquired by man [sic] as a member of society." It is in the face of these and other more pertinent definitions of the concept , that the concept of culture is contested terrain. (Tomaselli 1987:2)

According to Tomaselli, the 'contemporary' variant of cultural studies foregrounds structuralism. (ibid. op cit) Debates in the area of culture were often deadlocked around the polar opposites of structuralism and culturalism . Structuralism holds that individuals can only live and experience conditions in and through categories, classifications and frameworks of culture. This of course contrasts with the culturalist position which derives from a different set of theoretical premises - no less concerned with questions of struggle , class, subordination and power. Culturalism was often uncritically romantic in its celebration of popular culture as expressing the authentic interests and values of subordinate social groups and classes. This conception , moreover , resulted in an essentialist view of culture - that is , as the embodiment of specific class or gender essences. In the logic of this approach, as Parker and Pollock so aptly put it,

Many feminists were led to look for an authentically female culture as if this could exist isolated like some deep frozen essence in the freezer of male culture ... Just as many socialists rummaged through popular culture in search of the authentic voice of the working class, as if this could exist in some pure form, preserved and nurtured in a recess immune to the socially preponderant forms of cultural production in a capitalist society. (Bennet et al 1989 :xii)

Where structuralists argue that people make history, but under conditions which are not of their own making, culturalists aver that people are active agents in the making of their own history. These theoretical divergences made it seem almost as if

the cultural sphere was divided into two hermetically separate regions, each exhibiting a different logic. While this was unsatisfactory, it was equally clear that the two traditions could not be forced into a shot-gun marriage either. The only way out of this impasse, therefore, seemed to be to shift the debate on to a new terrain which displaced the structuralist-culturalist opposition, a project which inclined many writers at the time to draw heavily on the writings of Antonio Gramsci, particularly those on the subject of hegemony.

It is not within the ambit of this study to provide a detailed exposition of the reasons for this strategy or for an appraisal of its productivity. Suffice it to state that Gramsci's work provides the organising framework within which these studies were located. This 'turn to Gramsci' will be discussed at a later stage of this study when the concept of 'hegemony' is examined.

It has been seen that the sphere of culture is certainly not without its conflicts and diversities especially insofar as theory is concerned. Raymond Williams, in his discussions on the concept of 'culture', notes two decisive interventions of Marxism into the development of the concept. The first is the analysis of 'civil society' and the recognition of 'civilisation' as a specific historical form; bourgeois society as created by the capitalist mode of production. (Williams 1977:13) The second is the rejection of what Marx called 'idealist historiography'.

History was not primarily the overcoming of ignorance and superstition by knowledge and reason. What was excluded and thus lacking in that account , was material history, the history of labour, industry as "the open book of human faculties. " (ibid.) The Marxist view is that human labour is central, necessary and thus genuinely originating in the development of culture. The implication of this major contribution is that culture cannot be understood separately from economics and all aspects of material history. The real relations between culture and society have to be seen in terms of the particular mode of production and social order within which the relations practically occur. From this perspective , the central problem for cultural studies is how to relate a specific cultural form to the economic base within the social formation that has produced it. (Dalrymple 1987 :129) This problem relates to what has become known as the problem of the superstructure ie. to what extent is culture strictly determined by the economy or does it indeed possess a degree of autonomy ? In order to explore this , it is crucial to examine the main differences between a Marxist analysis of culture as well as other dominant views prevailing in South Africa.

The major difference is one between co-operation /consensus and conflict perspectives. For anthropology the dominant tendency is to identify the functional requisites of social harmony. The Marxist approach stresses the inherent tendency toward conflict

in society as a result of opposed interests of different classes. From this perspective then, the conditions and concerns of particular classes and their relation to the class struggle become important. Since the legitimacy of the social order is now in question, conformity and adaptation become problematic. Thus, the history of all societies is a history of class conflict and resistance is therefore seen as a principle of historical change, and culture is not a pre-determined model offered by the past; it is not a state of being but a state of becoming. (Tomaselli 1987:9)

In Marxist theory, the capitalist mode of production gives rise to opposing classes based on those who own the means of production and those who do not. The Marxist definition of class is thus differentiated from conventional definitions in which society is divided into strata, subgroups, subcultures etc. From the orthodox sociological approach, these groups can be isolated from each other, with their values and world views being defined independently as a reflection of their particular location in a given society. Immediately, when one speaks of classes, the notion of "consciousness" rears its highly contestable head. There have been various theories on the relationship between class, ideology and the development of a "class consciousness." For Jameson, the dynamics of ideology in its constituted form is described as a function of social class. (Jameson 1981:89-90) He argues that the very content of a class ideology is relational ie.

its values are always actively in situation with respect to the opposing class, and defined against the latter - normally the ruling class will seek various strategies of legitimation to secure its own power position, while an opposing culture or ideology will attempt to contest and undermine the dominant value system. Sole (1983 :65) states that this does not mean that 'ideology' is simply the consciousness belonging to the dominant classes, and 'culture' the consciousness belonging to the subordinate classes or community.

The peculiarity of South Africa's social formation has aided in the development of a racial consciousness rather than a class consciousness. The understanding of culture as primarily a matter of race , language and codes of behaviour is most divisive as it prevents the unification of the working class which is one of the two major contending classes in capitalist society and the only one structurally in a position to alter the relations of production.

In very broad terms, culture can be defined as

A description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour. (Williams 1963:75)

This definition suggests all the meanings and values implicit and explicit in a particular way of life, a particular culture. At another level, culture is "the body of intellectual and imaginative work," in which human thought and experience are

recorded (Williams 1963:59) In other words , culture is the oral, written and painted records of peoples life in society. (Williams 1963:60) This however appears to be a much narrower definition of culture. It was the writings and the historical studies of both R. Williams' and E.P Thompson that provided the basis for that view of culture which had emerged from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham

Culture is about how men and women actively respond to the conditions of their social existence, creatively fashioning experienced social relationships into diverse and structured patterns of living, thinking and feeling. (Bennet et al 1989 :10)

For Leon Trotsky,

Culture is the organic sum of knowledge and capacity which characterises the entire society, or at least its ruling class. It embraces and penetrates all fields of human work and unifies them into a system. Individual achievements rise above this level and elevate it gradually. (Quoted in Combrink 1990:20)

Nearer home, Ngugi has seen culture as " a product and reflection of human beings communicating with one another in the very struggle to create wealth and to control it." (ibid. op cit)

Leading from this , Albie Sachs has stated quite simply that,

Culture is not something separate from the general struggle. Culture is us, it is who we are , how we see ourselves, and the vision we have of the world. In the course of participating in the culture of liberation, we constantly re-make ourselves. (ibid. op cit)

Frantz Fanon, on the other hand, spoke of a "national culture" which he defined as follows,

A national culture is the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence. (Fanon 1967 :188)

Fanon adopts what can be termed as a more humanistic position on this oft debated definition. It was Fanon's belief that a truly national culture would only come from an awakened national consciousness. Earlier the point was made in a definition by Tomaselli that culture has been corrupted into a justification of apartheid by the ruling class; and the above definition from Fanon more than complements this view if we extrapolate it to the South African context.

Thus, it can be seen that the notion of culture is rather complex and we must try and avoid all over-simplified definitions of culture that equate it with the "sum of knowledge" theories and ideas, whether it be at the individual level or that of the people.

Tomaselli stresses the multi-faceted nature of culture, driving home the point that culture is not merely about a code of behaviour or dress or about values of different groups in society. Tomaselli maintains that the interpretation of culture is 'contested terrain' and is of particular significance in the critique of modern industrial society. Dalrymple (1987 : 132) makes an important point in regard to the nurturing of proletarian culture ie it is significant because the mass media

make the previously class - isolated bourgeois culture accessible to mass society where it is absorbed and where it undermines the independence of the working class. For Dalrymple (ibid.) , this process destroys the essential dialectic necessary to critical development.

The various definitions mentioned are not intended to confuse the reader, but rather to drive home the point that there is no one simple definition of culture. It is both necessary and important for us to review these perceptions of culture and critically evaluate them in relation to individual experiences. However, this is not to say that the above definitions run contrary to one another - they do indeed share a common thread in that they define culture in order to analyse it ; they define culture in order to bring about political and cultural transformation.

CRITICAL THEORY AND PRACTISE

All cultural scholars involved in research reflect in their work, either consciously or unconsciously , their own subjective perceptions regarding the nature and function of culture. These manifest themselves in the accumulated evidence , the methodology and the conceptual apparatus of that research. Recently , however there has been an increased awareness of the determining influences of critical attitudes, and researchers have become aware of the need to move away from the study of culture itself and to engage in the deep waters of critical theory and

practice. Thus, Steadman (1985 :7) argues that critical theory should, nevertheless, provide the foundations for any study of cultural activity , not merely because :

Art, like nature, has to be distinguished from the systematic study of it, which is criticism. (Frye 1957 :11)

but also because scholars should be able to provide a rationale for the conceptualisation of any research project (Steadman 1985:7)

To assume then , that criticism serves merely to interpret cultural artifacts is to assume a partial view of criticism - a view of the critic as a second hand writer who provides the commentary on the works of other writers. Criticism is of course more complex than this. It must not only interpret, but also explain. The important qualification here is that both interpretation and explanation are based upon critical attitudes which must therefore also be subjected to scrutiny. It then becomes necessary to analyse how critical activity is directed, in short to analyse theoretical strategies used in the study of culture. To select a theoretical framework is to hypothesize, to make a stand. This, of course, is the most difficult part of research because it is paradoxically , an acknowledgment of prejudice and a setting of limitations.

Writing must go hand in hand with silence; to write is in a sense to become "still as death" , to become

someone to whom the last word is denied; to write is to offer others , from the start , that last word. (Barthes 1964 :xi)

Nevertheless, that stand must be made and a position must be taken in order to clarify objectives and methodology. The real danger, however, is to succumb to a deterministic theoretical framework. This must be avoided at all costs. Any theoretical paradigm adopted must be derived from a rigorous assessment of many interacting factors. That, then, is the purpose of this chapter.

Assumption, conjecture and selection provide a necessary starting point for all research. Although they play a role in this study, they are reinforced by both evidence and conceptual strategies. In addition, in order to relate to this study the change and continuity evident within the sphere of culture, it is necessary to review some important recent developments in critical theory and practice.

By far, the most significant of these has been the return to themes focusing on literature and society. This has been a product of the influence of key European theorists , of the resurgence in Marxist cultural theory and responses to it , of the reaffirmation of post- Saussurean structuralism and of critical theory based on the notions of ideology and hegemony. These interventions have created a body of work which is of great significance and one which has crucially influenced the

theoretical paradigm of the present study.

Clearly a range of Marxist theorists have been used for this study and what has become apparent , is the extent to which they differ in their respective interpretations of Marxism. The fact that a variety of Marxist theorists have been referred to does not in any way imply a treatment of Marxism as a homogeneous theoretical paradigm. Marxism is itself a contested area - both within and without. Marxist approaches to culture are similarly contested. Often Marxists write from either culturalist or structuralist positions and many cultural theorists often deny writing from beneath the banner of Marxism.

Clearly there is a need to revisit Marxist theorisation of culture and this study attempts to make a small contribution in this regard by suggesting that Gramsci is the meeting point from which Marxists from a variety of traditions can once again begin their theoretical explorations.

SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Frye (1957:16) has stated that "if criticism is a science, it is clearly a social science." Culture, which falls within the ambit of social activity , is clearly within the embrace of a critical method is based upon sociology. Sociology is a critical discipline investigating social behaviour and institutions. Sociologically-based criticism , therefore , attempts to look theoretically at mechanisms underlying such behaviour and

empirically at the objective circumstances which have structured those mechanisms. A sociological investigation of culture thus demystifies socialised preconceptions about the nature and function of culture, in order to arrive at an understanding of the ways in which meaning is conditioned.

In South Africa this conditioning process has to be understood in political terms. Turner (1972) discusses the 'necessity of utopian thinking' as one way to achieve such an understanding. Reminding us that social institutions are little more than the embodiments of sets of behaviour patterns, he questions why we continue to take for granted the 'fixity' of social institutions and continue to act out the behaviour patterns which keep these institutions in being. (Turner 1972:4)

This study is concerned primarily with a theoretical assessment using conceptual strategies developed by sociology. There is no attempt here to define a social structure, but rather to study the nature of selected cultural activities and processes in their symbolic representation of social practices.

INTERPRETATION AND EXPLANATION

Studies of cultural expression often lend themselves to material that is laden with values. Often such studies are plagued by the tyranny of received habits in criticism. This has created attitudes to the study of culture which tend to be based on the foundations of interpretation or commonsense thinking : that

approach to cultural studies which assumes a close reading of a text will elucidate its inherent meaning and that the reader has merely to assess, independently , which is obvious, natural and commonsense. The problem with this notion is that one's thoughts are not independent but are selected from within a range of values; that which is natural or obvious is only so in terms of a particular system of values.

Thus, the notion of ideological construction now features. It therefore cannot be assumed that that our studies should be based solely upon an empirical assessment of facts. Theory is not abstract jargon as some observers maintain. The crux of the matter is that theory is always present - it is there in the methods, the assumptions, the preconceptions and even in the demarcation of the area of research. It is thus necessary to adopt a materialist basis for criticism. It is not enough simply to interpret a work according to one's subjective responses. The work also needs to be explained - the act of interpretation is the comprehension of a significant structure of consciousness in the work ; and explanation is the act of relating this structure to a larger structure of consciousness - about which the work is silent. (Steadman 1985:25) This larger structure is not the focus of study - it is only important insofar as it illuminates the genesis of the work. The researcher thus studies not only the object, but also the surrounding structure. In relation to this study, what is important is the relationship between the genesis

of various types of cultural discourse in South Africa and a broad structure of consciousness of which they are a product.

As a conceptual strategy , while it is possible to separate the notions of interpretation and explanation in this way , it is also true that they are by no means mutually exclusive :

Although it is true that in the practice of research, imminent interpretation and explanation through the surrounding structure are inseparable, and no progress can be made in either of these fields, except through a continual oscillation from one to another , it is none the less important to make a rigorous distinction between the interpretation and explanation in their nature and in the presentation of the results. (Goldmann 1980:177)

CHAPTER TWO

CULTURE, IDEOLOGY AND HEGEMONY - THE TURN TO GRAMSCI

Within the Marxist tradition Gramsci's work represents a decisive innovation with respect to the analysis of the complex areas of culture and ideology. Of course this is not all of what Gramsci is about, but it is perhaps the most important and original aspect of his work and this is invaluable for any analysis of culture.

Gramsci, writing before the Frankfurt School, rekindled the embers of Western critical thought which was becoming sceptical of the emancipatory potential of eastern socialism. (Tomaselli 1987:5). Gramsci explained the failure of the working class revolution in terms of the concept of hegemony, where the ruling classes are able to induce the masses to consent to their subordination. Tomaselli (1987:6) asserts that whereas the 'critical theory' of the Frankfurt School as a whole, endorsed the negative reading of the technological rationalisation of the the social and moral lifeworld, Gramsci was the first western socialist after Lenin to approach ideology from a positive and strategic perspective.

The central dynamic, especially of those writings in prison, consists of a critique, on the one hand , of the traditional tendency to separate out the areas of politics and culture, and

on the other, the orthodox Marxist tendency to reduce the complexity of culture to the status of a "transmission belt" for the dominant class in any given society. This dual critique is mobilised around the central concept of HEGEMONY.

The concept of hegemony is frequently used by sociologists and political commentators alike to simply designate domination. But for Gramsci, it signifies something much more complex - he uses the concept to examine the precise political, cultural and ideological forms through which a class, in any given society, is able to establish its leadership minus the more coercive forms of its domination. In so doing, Gramsci is able to reformulate the whole question of the relationship between class and culture; he suggests that the terrain of culture is a strategic field for the establishment of forms of consent and he marks out the ways in which cultural and ideological forms are historically negotiated between dominant and subordinate groups.

In working through the concept of hegemony, Gramsci is making three distinct challenges. The first is to the liberal-idealist tradition which conceives of culture and cultural questions as essentially a-political.

The second challenge is to his fellow Marxists who had reduced culture to a mere 'reflection' of the economic base of society. Gramsci termed this reductionism which was dominant in the Marxism of his time, 'economism' or, 'vulgar materialism'. The

third challenge , related to the first two , was to his contemporaries to transform the existing, fragile, hegemony of the Italian State into a new 'intellectual and moral' leadership which would be expansive and democratic. The call went unheeded of course, as Mussolini and his forces imposed quite a different form of domination on Italian society. Gramsci's years in prison were to be a reflection on the causes of this failure.

Thus for Gramsci there is a crucial link between culture and politics but this link is far from being a simple or mechanical one. Gramsci rejected the cruder and more orthodox Marxist conceptions of 'class-domination' in favour of a more sophisticated coupling of 'force and consent' (or coercion plus hegemony, as he puts it). (Bennet et al 1989 :192)

The *raison d'être* behind the importance which Gramsci conferred on the analysis of culture was set out by him at the age of 24. Although it is seen as a zealous and polemical article (ibid. 193), it contains many insightful elements. The following passages simply cannot do justice to the immense range of Gramsci's work. They have been selected in the hope that some of the key concepts and forms of analysis may emerge in embryonic form at least.

On the analysis of culture,

We need to free ourselves from the habit of seeing culture as encyclopaedic knowledge, and men as mere receptacles to be stuffed full of empirical data ...

which have to be filed in the brains as in the columns of a dictionary, enabling the owner to respond to the various stimuli from the outside world. This form of culture is really dangerous, particularly for the proletariat. It serves only to create maladjusted people who believe they are superior to the rest of humanity because they have memorised a certain number of facts and dates and rattle them off at every opportunity, so turning them almost into a barrier between themselves and others...The young lawyer who has been successful in wringing a scrap of paper called a degree out of the laziness and lackadaisical attitude of his professors - they end up seeing themselves as different from and superior to even the best skilled workman who fulfills a precise and indispensable task in life and is a hundred times more valuable in his activity than they are in theirs.

But this is not culture, but pedantry, not intelligence, but intellect and it is absolutely right to react against it.

Culture is something quite different. It is organisation, discipline of one's inner self, a coming to terms with one's own personality... with the aid of which one succeeds in understanding one's own historical value...

(Bennet et al 1989:193-4)

Twenty years later, writing from prison, he became more specific as well as more analytical,

It would be interesting to study concretely the forms of cultural organisation which keep the ideological world in movement within a given country, and to examine how they function in practice. A study of the numerical relationship between the section of the population professionally engaged in active cultural work in the country in question and the population as a whole, would be useful, together with an approximate calculation of the unattached forces. From this one could deduce the importance of the 'cultural aspect', even in practical activity.

(Bennet et al 1989:196)

Gramsci's notion of hegemony provides an important context for this study. Within the South African context, the relations of

capital and class have been the subject of many a vigorous debate as well as numerous academic works. The application of these studies to cultural work is virtually non-existent. While Gramsci's ideas were articulated primarily in relation to different co-ordinates of capital and industry in Italy, the South African context can also be better understood in terms of his notion of hegemony. Ideological and cultural forms of control are extensively used in South Africa and part of this study will attempt to understand the ways in which the cultural project selected for study attempt to respond to these pressures.

On hegemony,

Undoubtedly the fact of hegemony presupposes that account be taken of the interests and the tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised, and that a certain compromise of equilibrium should be formed - in other words, that the leading group should make sacrifices of an economic-corporate kind. But there is also no doubt that such sacrifices cannot touch the essential, for though hegemony is political, it must also be economic, it must necessarily be based on the decisive function exercised by the leading group in the decisive nucleus of economic activity. (Bennet et al 1989: 198-9)

Gramsci's work which totally shunned the intolerable condescension of the mass culture critic, as well as simultaneously avoided any tendency toward a celebratory populism, that disqualified the bipolar alternatives of structuralism and culturalism. For Gramsci, culture is viewed neither as the site of the peoples' cultural deformation nor as that of their own self-making; rather it is conceptualised as a

force field of relations shaped precisely by these contradictory pressures and tendencies - a perspective which enables a significant reformulation of both the theoretical and the political issues at stake in the study of culture. (Bennet et al 1986 :xiii)

Moreover, Gramsci's work is crucial to cultural studies if the concept of resistance is to be adequately explained. As Tomaselli argues, that the two pitfalls common to socialist writing were addressed by Gramsci.

Firstly, economic reductionism which reduces all social activity to movements in the economic base and the second is , class reductionism which collapses all social conflict to capital versus labour contradiction. (Tomaselli 1987:12). Gramsci does not simplistically relate cultural expression to class and economic causes. Such analyses are misleading and are not even within the parameters of contemporary Marxist thought,

any single economic class ...Indeed , it is a fundamental premise of the Marxist theory of the state that in capitalist social formations, the state is the site where the 'unity' of the dominant ideology , under the dominance of a leading fraction of capital , is constructed; and thus where hegemony is secured ; this securing involving the role of the state in forming alliances , elaborating strategies which impose a unity on the competing fractions of capital, and thus sustaining the long-term conditions for expanded reproduction - frequently against the the particular 'class interests' of particular 'class fractions' (Quoted in Steadman 1985:34)

For Gramsci then, cultural and ideological practises are to be understood and assessed in terms of their functioning within the antagonistic relations between the bourgeois and the working class as the two fundamental classes of capitalist society.

The point of departure of Gramsci from the earlier Marxist tradition was in arguing that the cultural and ideological relations between the ruling and subordinate classes in capitalist societies consist in the domination of the latter by the former than in the struggle for hegemony ie. for moral, cultural, intellectual and, thereby, political leadership over the whole of society - between the ruling class and the working class. (ibid. :op cit) The use of the concept of hegemony instead of domination is not merely terminological - it puts forward an entirely different conception of the means by which cultural and ideological struggles are conducted. According to the dominant ideology thesis, bourgeois culture and ideology seek to replace working class ideology and culture and thus become directly operative in framing working class experience. Gramsci, on the contrary , argued that the bourgeoisie can become a hegemonic, leading class only to the degree that bourgeois ideology is able to accommodate opposing class cultures and values. Bourgeois hegemony is secured not via the obliteration of working class culture, but via its articulation through bourgeois culture and ideology so that, in being associated with and expressed in the forms of the latter, its political affiliations are altered in

the process.

As a consequence of accommodating elements of opposing cultures, 'bourgeois culture' ceases to be purely or entirely bourgeois. It becomes , instead , a mobile combination of cultural and ideological elements derived from different class locations , which are, but only provisionally and for the duration of a specific historical conjecture , affiliated to bourgeois values, interests and objectives. Similarly, members of the subordinate classes never encounter or are oppressed by a dominant ideology in some pure or class essentialist form; bourgeois ideology is encountered only in the compromised forms it must take in order to provide some accommodation for opposing class values.
(Quoted in Gray 1978:15)

As Gray (1978) remarks, if the Gramscian concept of hegemony refers to the processes through which the ruling class seeks to negotiate opposing class cultures onto a cultural and ideological terrain which for it is a position of leadership, it is also true that what is hereby consented to is a negotiated version of ruling class culture and ideology :

Class hegemony is a dynamic and shifting relationship of social subordination, which operates in two directions. Certain aspects of the behavior and consciousness of the subordinate classes may reproduce a version of the values of the ruling class. But in the process value systems are modified, through their necessary adaptation to diverse conditions of existence; the subordinate classes thus follow a 'negotiated version' of ruling class values. On the other hand, structures of ideological hegemony transform and incorporate dissident values, so as effectively to prevent the working through of their full implications. (Gray 1978 :16)

The main point to be drawn out is that the sphere of culture and ideology cannot be conceived as being divided into two

hermetically separate and entirely opposing class cultures and ideologies. Gramsci's concept of hegemony recognises the wholeness of the processes of domination and subordination within an actual social formation by refusing to equate consciousness with the articulate formal system which can be abstracted as ideology. (Dalrymple 1987:136)

Gramsci's work has important implications for this study as it will show the ways in which ideology , not involving conscious knowledge, weaves itself into the work of those artists who set out to question the dominant values. As Steadman (1985) states , ideology does not involve a conscious distortion , but an unavoidable mystification. Ideology obscures the rules and the structures by which we live our relations to our conditions of existence and through which we decode reality. It inserts individuals into a framework which supports their material experience of the world. (Steadman 1985:35)

This discussion then, of ideology and hegemony, is by no means a digression. The role of ideology will be seen to be crucial to the focus on the development of the cultural project and its activities.

WORKING CLASS CULTURE - Sociological or Socialist Concept of Culture ?

Over the last few years, debates about culture have been raging in many forms. But all too often predictable responses emerge to the difficult questions posed by cultural engagement. For many, cultural activity must be judged by its political validity. If, for example, a film or book portrays women as victims of violence, it cannot be good. Conversely, art with 'progressive' attitudes - such as anti-racism or anti-sexism- must be inherently good.

Another major problem is to view art and other forms of culture, as simply reflecting the values of particular classes within society. Generally one is expected to regard all "high art" - especially the expensive 'spectator' arts of the theatre, opera and the art galleries, as exclusive, middle class and beyond the pale of the working class. A short step from this is to counterpoise 'working class culture' to 'high culture.' (German 1991:12) But these stark distinctions are inadequate for a radical conceptualisation and theorisation of culture. It is important to appreciate, and not to underestimate, the number of different levels of art and culture. This is imperative, for not only does this deepen our understanding of society in general, but also helps us measure the level of development both of our particular society and of individuals within it.

Perhaps that is the reason why the great Marxists have never been indifferent to cultural questions. Marx himself saw culture as a sign of social development and the pinnacle of human achievement. But it was Trotsky and Gramsci who deserve the highest accolades in regard to their contribution to cultural theory. Trotsky had always argued that art could not be seen in a mechanical way and he described culture as,

The organic sum of knowledge and capacity which characterises the entire society, or at least its ruling class. (German 1991:12)

It is therefore both connected to society and has something to say that attempts to go beyond the society. Particular forms of art and culture are products of particular societies and cannot be appreciated in isolation from these societies. Marx made a similar point when he described the way in which art reflected the development of society.

The epic poem or the Greek tragedy might still remain of artistic interest but would no longer be the dominant form of art in a society where for example scientific research which could make much more sense of the world, would be of paramount importance.

Is the view of nature and of social relations which shaped Greek imagination and Greek art possible in the age of automatic machinery, and railways and locomotives ...? All mythology masters and dominates and shapes the forces of nature in and through the imagination ; hence it disappears as soon as man gains mastery over the forces of nature. (Quoted in German 1991:13)

Art and culture produced by the capitalist class was a reflection of this development of society, and resulted , by Marx's time, in some of the finest artistic production ever seen. The bourgeoisie or the new capitalistic class, developed inside the womb of the old feudal society.

It developed immense power and wealth over the centuries before it actually took political power. The year 1848 was a turning point. From then on the new capitalist class ceased to be revolutionary and its world view splintered. Increasingly some of the best art was produced, not in celebration of the new capitalist world, but in reaction against it. It was in Russia especially, under the impact of the 1917 revolution, that many became committed to ideas of explicitly socialist art and culture. Many believed that just as the capitalist class had developed its own culture before it engaged in a successful revolution, so the working class could develop its own culture within capitalist society, which would stand in complete contradiction to bourgeois culture.

In the post 1917 period in Russia, the Bolsheviks had to wage an ideological battle against old ideas and some new ones as well. Even the briefest excursion into cultural areas raised questions fundamental to the revolution. In particular, how did changes in the economic base of society alter the ideas and cultural forms of that society ?

In these circumstances discussion of art , literature and culture in general were of great importance. The literature , for example of the post-revolutionary period reflected all the contradictions and upheavals of the revolution itself. As Trotsky put it,

The nightingale of poetry, like that bird of wisdom, the owl, is heard only after the sun is set. The day is a time for action, but at twilight feeling and reason come to take account of what has been accomplished. (Trotsky 1991, 53)

In Literature and Revolution, one of Trotsky's primary aims is to try and show the relationship between social movements and culture. Trotsky argues that there is always a relationship between art and revolution, but the relationship is not always a direct or obvious one. The revolution did not just change the economic basis of society, ushering workers' control over production as opposed to capitalist exploitation. It also meant a total upheaval in every sphere of life. Education was transformed, there was a flowering of cultural forms and workers who had previously been uninterested in any form of art and often illiterate , found themselves immersed in theatre, ballet and various forms of visual art. Trotsky's attitude to various Russian artists and his discussion of their work forms a large part of his book and in the process he tries to explain the relationship between art and society. Trotsky understood very well that the nature of art in any society depended on the social conditions :

It is very true that one cannot always go by the principles of Marxism in deciding whether to reject or to accept a work of art. A work of art should in the first place, be judged by its own law, that is by the law of art. But Marxism alone can explain why and how a given tendency in art has originated in a given period of history; in other words, who it was who made demand for such an artistic form and not for another and why. (ibid. 12)

Culture severed from its social connections can lead to the idea of culture for culture's sake. One of the major areas where this became a problem for Trotsky was over the question of whether there was , or could be such a thing as 'proletarian' culture. During the post-revolutionary period, the influence of modernism on art was very great. It was believed that revolutionary artists should reject the art of the past and develop a proletarian or workers' culture which could speak directly in the interests of the working class. One of the strongest expressions of this view was the 'Proletcult' movement , which sprang up among Russian writers and artists in the course of the revolution. It rejected past art as completely worthless to the working class.

A flavour of its aims can be found in its statement :

In the name of our future we are burning Raphael, destroying the museums, and trampling on the flowers of art. (Trotsky 1991: 30)

As a speaker at the first Proletcult conference in 1918 stated

We are entering the new life with a load of proletarian consciousness. They want to load us with another excessive burden - the achievements of bourgeois

culture. In that case, we will be like an overloaded camel, unable to go any further. Let us throw away bourgeois culture as entirely rubbish. (Quoted in German 1991:14)

This rejection of the past was in some way understandable, coming as it did on the crest of a revolutionary wave. It seemed to millions that most things were possible, including the development of a genuinely working class culture which was both produced by the workers and which was accessible to millions more workers and peasants.

A brief incursion into Russian history is necessary at this point so as to provide a picture (albeit a sketchy one), of the actual struggle that took place in Russia over the question of culture after the revolution. Following the establishment of Proletcult, the 1934 Congress of Soviet Writers officially adopted the doctrine of "socialist realism" - created by Stalin and Gorky and promulgated by Stalin's cultural thug , Zhdanov. According to this doctrine, it was the writer's duty

...to provide a truthful, historico-concrete portrayal of reality in its revolutionary development, taking into account the problem of ideological transformation and the education of workers in the spirit of socialism. (Trotsky 1991: 123)

Space does not permit a recount in full, of the chilling narrative of how the loss of the Bolshevik revolution under Stalin expressed itself in one of the most devastating assaults

on artistic culture ever witnessed in modern history - an assault conducted in the name of a theory and practice of social liberation. A brief account will have to suffice.

After the 1917 revolution , the Bolshevik Party had little control of culture until 1928, when the first five year plan was initiated. Several relatively independent cultural organizations flourished. The relative culturalism of this period with its medley of artistic movements reflected the relative liberalism of the New Economic Policy of those years. Initially the first Party declaration on culture was fairly neutral, refusing to commit itself to a single trend. Lunacharsky, the first Bolshevik Minister of Culture, encouraged at this time, all art forms not openly hostile to the revolution, despite considerable personal sympathy with the aims of Proletkult. Proletkult regarded art as a class weapon and completely rejected bourgeois culture: recognising that proletarian culture was weaker than its bourgeois counterpart, it sought to develop a distinctively proletarian art which would organise working class ideas towards collectivist rather than individualist goals.

The dogmatism of Proletkult was continued in the late 1920's by the All Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP) , the historical function of which was to absorb other cultural organisations and eliminate liberal tendencies in culture. RAPP eventually became too "individualistic" for Stalin and in 1932 it

was dissolved, to be replaced by the Soviet Writers Union, a direct organ of Stalin's power of which membership was compulsory for publication.

There followed throughout the 1940's and early 1950's a series of crippling decrees:

...culture itself sank to a nadir of false optimism and uniform plots. (Eagleton 1989:40)

The poet Mayakovsky had committed suicide in 1930; nine years later Meyerhold, the experimental theatre producer whose pioneering work influenced Brecht, and was denounced as decadent, declared publicly that "this pitiable and sterile thing called socialist realism has nothing to do with art." He was arrested the following day and died soon afterwards; his wife was murdered. (Eagleton 1989:40)

Yet Proletcult was bitterly attacked by Lenin, and more so by Trotsky who argued that in order for the new workers state to develop and move towards socialism, it had to build on what had gone before. This applied to using technological advance and scientific research for the benefit of the revolution. But Trotsky also extended this view to bourgeois art and culture, saying that it could help in the understanding of human beings and of society's development. To reject what had gone before meant rejecting the sum of human culture and everything that artists had achieved prior to the socialist revolution. In

addition , Trotsky argued that it was impossible for a 'proletarian culture ' to develop even within a workers' state.

Part of Literature and Revolution is a polemic against this movement and the ideas it expressed. Trotsky argued that the development of a proletarian culture is an impossible aim. He argues this in terms of both the nature of the proletariat itself and of the classless society which the revolution attempts to build, in which no one class will have its own culture. It is worth examining the arguments put forward here.

Trotsky's polemic contained the following arguments. He argued firstly, that the working class had to build on the existing bourgeois culture because, as a class it had a very low level of culture itself. This was especially true in Russia, where many workers were barely literate, and where the level of workers' cultural organisations had been very low in comparison with Germany, for example. But even in the most advanced capitalist societies, the working class was deprived of many of the cultural benefits that the ruling classes and the middle classes had.

Secondly, the working class - and here he was writing several years after the revolution - does not have the time and the leisure to develop its own culture. This is true both for pre-revolution when the system of exploitation condemned workers to long hours in factories and exhaustion in their leisure time; and

post revolution, when the need successively to defend and extend the revolution occupied the vast majority of material and human resources.

The revolution lays out the ground for a new society. But it does so with the methods of the old society, with the class struggle, with violence, destruction and annihilation. If the proletarian revolution had not come, mankind would have been strangled by its own contradictions. The revolution saved society and culture, but by means of the most cruel surgery. (Quoted in German 1991:14)

Trotsky's third objection to the idea of a proletarian culture lay in the fundamental differences between the bourgeoisie as a class and the proletariat. The nascent capitalist class had hundreds of years in which to develop its culture, its institutions, its wealth and its power. The proletariat had no such option. It is a class which is essentially without property, without wealth, and without any power inside capitalist society. Thus because the task of the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism is so immense, it requires all workers' resources to ensure that their most basic needs can be fulfilled.

Therefore, argues Trotsky, it is quite wrong to believe that proletarian culture can be achieved in a few years and just as wrong to reject all of past culture in the process. The dangers inherent in demands for an instant 'proletarian culture' were, according to Trotsky,

Because they erroneously compress the culture of the future into the narrow limits of the present day. They falsify perspectives, they violate proportions, they distort standards and they cultivate the arrogance of small circles which is most dangerous. (Trotsky 1991, 233)

But what about in a socialist society, when the immediate tasks of the workers' revolution have been fulfilled ? Here Trotsky argues that this will only be accomplished with the withering of the state , when there ceases to be the need to defend workers' interests . In such a situation, the cultural products of society will not be the products of any one class but of the collective efforts of all. They will therefore not be a proletarian culture but a human culture.

As Trotsky wrote in 1930 , on the poet Mayakovsky's suicide,

The struggle for "proletarian culture - something on the order of the "total collectivisation" of all humanity's gains within the span of a single five year plan - had at the beginning of the October revolution the character of utopian idealism, and it was precisely on this basis that it was rejected by Lenin and the author of these lines. In recent years it has become simply a system of bureaucratic command over art and a way of impoverishing it. (ibid. op cit)

What then do we make of these theories in relation to the South African context and society? Does it mean that we can only appreciate high culture and that we should go to the opera and wait for the revolution ? Is it impossible for workers to produce a culture or art worth talking about ? And does it mean that

socialists must reject all forms of art and culture which developed after the high point of bourgeois art ?

Clearly any of these positions would be absurd. Any rejection of art and culture after the period of 'high bourgeois culture' can only lead to to an incredibly narrow interpretation of culture. Indeed, some of the best artistic productions since then have been in reaction to the system, for example, the plays of Brecht, the writings of Joyce and the paintings of Picasso, Munch and Christiansson.

It is also obviously the case that many working people have been and are involved in producing art, as this study of the Pietermaritzburg Cultural Project will show. The actions of these individuals according to German (1991) , however , do not and cannot add up to a working 'class culture.' In the words of Trotsky

It would be extremely light minded to give the name of proletarian culture even to the most valuable achievements of the working class. One cannot turn the concept of culture into the small change of individual daily living and determine the success of a class culture by the proletarian passports of individual inventors or poets. (Trotsky 1991, 228)

Under capitalism these workers will remain a tiny minority and their position prevents them from developing a view of the world which can become hegemonic. That will only come through a process of making the revolution itself.

TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

It is thus important to note that popular culture is not simply class conscious. However, this does not necessarily negate a denial of the analytical value of class as a concept but should make clear the fact that "culture " and "class" are not exactly co-terminous categories in South Africa. Bozzoli (1990) cites a number of reasons for this, inter alia, the consistent use of racial ideology as a means to capitalist development; the failure of "class-based" communities to evolve because of ethnic factors, as well as the role of the state in promoting impoverishment.

Perhaps the simplest way to elucidate the race-class and apartheid-capitalism debate is to view it in terms of the peculiarity of capitalist development in this country. The discovery of gold and the development of gold mining in South Africa led to the domination of the capitalist mode of production. From very early on, mining capital recognised that it was imperative that production costs, especially labour costs, be kept to an absolute minimum because of the low-grade quality of the ore on the Witwatersrand and the fixed price of gold on the world market. Moreover, because neither blacks nor whites possessed the necessary skills to service the mines, expensive foreign labour had to be imported from Europe. Skilled jobs in South Africa thus became monopolised by whites. The expensive nature of skilled labour further pressurised mining capital to

reduce costs with regard to unskilled labour. This was done through the utilisation of the existing reserve system which was still outside the determining influence of the capitalist mode of production, and which considerably reduced the cost of reproducing black labour power.

This super-exploitative system was carried over into the Union of South Africa. The latter adopted the pre-capitalist system of class and racial relations, and refined, developed and perpetuated it to serve the interests of mining and agricultural capital in this country. As Nosizwe notes, the Union of South Africa's drastic curtailment and denial of franchise rights for blacks, "measures which were interpreted and explained on the grounds of race," (Nosizwe 1979 :156) served the interests of mining capital by providing the latter with the political and legal space to maximise the exploitation of the black mineworkers. This exploitation of labour through the denial of national, democratic and legal rights to the black population had continued unabated through the ensuing decades. This of-course is not to suggest that the various fractions of capital displayed a homogeneous response to this process. On the contrary, contradictions between the various fractions constantly arose with regard to their "differential needs for labour of differential quality" (Nosizwe 1979 :156) However these contradictions were resolved through the state by adaptations of the original process. Thus the contradictions that arose after

1920 between primary and secondary industry were initially resolved by "segregation" and after 1948, by means of Apartheid.

Racism was thus functional to the rapid development of capitalism in South Africa. However this should not lead to a conclusion that suggests that capitalist relations in South Africa would inevitably and inescapably have to adopt a racial form. Wolpe correctly criticizes this view since it "functions to close off questions about the possible separation of and contradictions between capitalism and racism." (Wolpe 1988 :31-32) Wolpe's critique is borne out by the developments over the last two decades which indicate that apartheid has indeed become a fetter to the further expansion of certain fractions of capital, particularly the manufacturing and merchant sectors. These latter fractions of capital are dependent on the availability of semi-skilled and skilled labour, as well as on the expansion of the home market for their continued growth - factors retarded by the continued existence of formal apartheid. Coupled with this, for these fractions of capital, is the instability inherent in the system which in threatening the politics of white domination, also jeopardises the reproduction of the entire social system. These factors have then compelled these fractions of capital to intervene with reformist policies in the political arena, in an attempt to detach capitalism from the maintenance of white domination - provided of course, that the latter occurred without

endangering the continued reproduction of the South African reformed capitalist order.

Nevertheless, despite this, the interpenetration which has already occurred between racial and class categories in the South African context, ensures that class will , for the foreseeable future, manifest itself in a racial form. The implication of this is that South African culture will continually express the divisions sowed by our apartheid legacy.

For Cabral (1980 :50), "... culture, whatever its ideological or idealist expression, is an essential element of people's history." It is partly correct then , to describe the different cultural manifestations emerging from the townships , whether they be film, a form of poetry, theatre or music, as being African art or more specifically having a "working class character." In South Africa, not only does race determine people's material conditions but also their notions of culture.

It is, therefore, against this background that we need to understand and examine the development of cultural expression and production in South Africa. The quality and content of cultural expressions emerging in recent times clearly depict the struggles of the oppressed and exploited masses in South African society. A myriad of issues are broached, ranging from worker's struggles, school boycotts and violence, to national and women's struggles. The various art forms, then, are both a reflection of

the intense political and social struggles being waged, as well as a means of agitation for participation in, and commitment to, the process of struggle for liberation. Cultural activity is a way of allowing people to start controlling and using their creative power.

As aptly stated by the cultural group interviewed by the South African Labour Bulletin,

"... it creates a better sense of unity amongst workers... and the struggle to make them available enriches us ... it educates us about our struggle and puts across a true picture of things - our picture."
(SALB 1985: 69)

X Socialists can play a small but important role in relating to cultural questions. But this means rejecting the idea that we understand culture simply by looking at who consumes it. There are sorts of activities inside capitalism which fall under cultural headings but which are a product of alienation rather than an attempt to develop insights into society. A Marxist theory of culture has to build on those developments while avoiding any tendency to see a narrow or mechanical link between politics and culture. Given that there is certainly not going to be a revolutionary overthrow of the apartheid regime any more than the question of the socialist project being on the agenda of main contender for power on the left, the ANC, it still remains crucial to continue developing cultural and artistic forms that are a reflection of the lives and experiences of the oppressed

and exploited of this country, for the struggles of the past and those yet to erupt cannot be relegated to the backwaters of history.

One further issue needs to be addressed prior to proceeding to a discussion of the project. The appropriateness of the Gramscian approach to the South African context, upon which this study has so heavily relied on, is bound to be questioned. But in the writer's view Gramsci's approach is more than useful for understanding South Africa of the late eighties and early nineties.

The usefulness of Gramsci at a theoretical level, as already stated earlier on, is demonstrated in that it is a meeting point of the culturalist and structuralist approaches to culture. In this sense, it enables one to harness the creative merits of both traditions, whilst simultaneously, enabling us to discard the weaknesses of both approaches. Yet Gramsci has the other undoubted merit in his applicability to the current conjuncture in South Africa. Gramsci's emphasis on hegemony is founded on the premise that the consent of the masses must be struggled for and won prior to the launch of an insurrection. This theoretical position emerged as a result of his experiences in the Italy of the 1920's, where the workers movement was horribly defeated by the fascism of Mussolini. In this context, with revolution receding from the political agenda, Gramsci suggested that what

was required was a war of position, a continuous assault on the ideological constructs of ruling class hegemony. In this way the foundations of the new society were to be created in the womb of the old.

There are clear parallels between the present conditions in South Africa and Gramsci's Italy of the 1920's. At present, as a result of both the violence that wracks our society and the demobilising effects of negotiations, revolution has also receded off our political agenda. In this context, political commentators make constant reference to Gramsci's war of position and the need to slowly hegemonise progressive and socialist discourse and values within civil society. (See Habib: 1991) Cultural expressions and struggles in the current context need to be understood within this broader political framework.

CHAPTER 3

OTHER PROJECTS, METHODOLOGY, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Within the context of seeking alternate cultural forums , there have been a number of cultural projects that have been established in South Africa. The *raison d'être* behind these was particularly to challenge both the status quo as well as the hegemony of the white cultural establishment over what is perceived to be the "right" kind of culture in terms of its various facets - poetry, drama, song and dance etc. Two cultural projects that are presently in existence are worth mentioning. Firstly , the Culture and Working Life Project is one that is based at the University of Natal under the Sociology Department and the second is the Community Arts Project which is based in Cape Town. For the purposes of this study, the Community Arts Project (CAP) is of particular significance and will be singled out for special attention as similarities can be drawn between CAP and the Pietermaritzburg project.

The Culture and Working Life project was initiated in 1983 after the growth of organised black working class culture began to have an impact on organised labour. The project had its origins in the Cultural movement. It soon became apparent that a permanent working group was needed to assist workers in expressing their class culture and thus the project was born. Later, a cultural diploma course was instituted as a consequence

of cultural work emerging as a crucial arena for self expression and mobilisation. Culture was also a means by which people could exercise control over their material conditions in life and express their grievances. From its inception , the project has been servicing and training members of the trade union movement, communities, youth and women's organisations. However, the cultural workers were unable to ensure that the workshops that had been conducted , helped to develop and establish a consistent cultural organisation.

The Community Arts Project is a progressive education and training organisation which seeks to promote and develop the arts, crafts and media as vehicles for social transformation and as a means for community and human development. It has four main projects, Visual Arts and Crafts, Media, Children's Arts and Popular Theatre and within these projects full-time and part-time training courses are planned and implemented. In addition, workshops are run on either an ongoing or one-off basis depending on the subject and the needs of the community.

CAP has also been aware of the prevailing conditions in wider society as well as the social , political and economic factors which, of necessity, impinge on its course content and policies. A case in point with regard to CAP is the introduction of the Popular Theatre course which was the antecedent of the Community Theatre course in operation in the 1984/5 period. According to

the organisers,

While billed as a community theatre course, in terms of of actual results, the course turned out to be largely a training ground for black professional performers who did not have access to other more formal training.
(van Graan 1990 : 1)

The reasons for these shortcomings were attributed to the fact that CAP did not have an overall educational, political or cultural vision to guide the development of its various projects. (ibid.). In addition, the legacy of apartheid society and education means that most of those skilled in the arts come from the white privileged sectors of society and with regard to theatre, the experience, education, aesthetic tastes, values and involvements of such skilled people have an overwhelming bias towards commercial or establishment theatre.

CAP organisers also found that with the political situation deteriorating rapidly in 1985, it became increasingly fashionable for liberal commercial theatres to host 'black' plays and to have black performers on their stages. Moreover, at that time, cultural programmes were not being developed within, or taken seriously by the community organisations which comprised the broad democratic movement. These organisations had other priorities and did not see the need or have the energy or time to develop cultural work in the communities where they existed.

Thus, the idea of developing a popular theatre course emerged as a result of the above problems as well as what CAP organisers

termed the "prevailing conditions." During the late 1980's as political repression and resistance was heightened, they identified two things that had occurred in the cultural sphere. Firstly, there had been a spontaneous upsurge in cultural activity within oppressed communities as they sought to explore and communicate their struggles; and secondly, as the states of emergency had curbed "traditional" forms of progressive political activity, community organisations have used "culture " or the arts more and more as a means of gathering people, in order to communicate political themes, boosting the morale of activists and maintaining in general , some kind of organisational profile. However , as time drew on, the arts began to acquire much more respect and this is also reflected in terms of a greater commitment to its development within the broad democratic movement than perhaps a few years ago.

However, despite this sudden upsurge in cultural activity with a tremendous amount of energy being channeled in this direction, what has become clear is a host of deficiencies within the progressive cultural movement. Many of the problems identified by CAP organisers are similar to those affecting the Pietermaritzburg Cultural Arts Project, if not the same in some instances.

Firstly, there is a dire lack of human resources particularly demonstrated in the lack of leadership. Once again, the legacy of

apartheid society and education has ensured the dissemination of skills and knowledge only amongst the privileged in society who as mentioned previously, have a particular bias in their work due to their particular class position and background and their lack of understanding, experience and commitment to working class politics is reflected rather starkly. In the case of the Pietermaritzburg project, this was one of the problems experienced with white students from the Fine Arts department of the University of Natal. On the other hand, cultural workers from working class backgrounds may have organisational experience but they desperately lack some sort of grounding in cultural theory and in some cases artistic skills.

The second major obstacle facing cultural projects is the severe lack of material resources to sustain cultural work in deprived communities. There are not many venues where performances can be held; there is a lack of training facilities in townships; there is a gross deficiency in terms of physical resources by way of equipment; and finally the dire shortage of funding is always at the forefront of most of the problems facing cultural projects.

The other impediment to the development of cultural work is the highly inadequate organisational infrastructure that barely exists in the townships. Most cultural projects in the country including the Pietermaritzburg Community Arts Project, would clearly be able to identify with the problems mentioned above.

BACKGROUND

The establishment of the Pietermaritzburg Community Arts Project occurred in an environment where large sectors of the black population, particularly the unemployed youth, were marginalised. This was the result of two phenomena : the effects of the economic crisis, and the devastating violence that has affected the Midlands region.

In order to properly locate and contextualise the project it is imperative to provide a summary of the Pietermaritzburg region as well as provide the various approaches towards an understanding of the violence in the area.

Pietermaritzburg is the second largest city in the Natal region and has a population of approximately 500 000 people, of whom more than 80% are black (African, Coloured and Indian). The city area is surrounded by five "African" townships : Sobantu, Edendale, Imbali, Ashdown and Vulindlela. Of these, only Imbali falls under the administration of the KwaZulu Bantustan Authority. Thus in the majority of the townships, Inkatha is denied the bureaucratic access routes that it has at its service in other regions of Natal.

Pietermaritzburg is faced with a high level of unemployment. Total black unemployment is estimated at 31% whilst that of whites is estimated at just under 5% . The age of the unemployed provides some explanation of the social basis of political action

as well as why the youth are the most frustrated grouping in contemporary South African society. About 80 % of the unemployed are under 35 years of age; 46% below 25 years old; and 15 % under 20 years of age. (Gwala 1989 :506-7)

Increasingly the African youth is becoming hit by unemployment. Thus, the economic crisis in the country manifests itself in a stark manner, creating lives of poverty , deprivation and misery for the majority of workers and their families. The conditions under which people live are appalling and life in the townships is characterised by lack of sewerage systems, no electricity or running water, overcrowding, dirt roads etc.

Working people , urbanised for many years, have forsaken many of the traditions of rural life. Their lifestyles have been molded by industrial capitalism both at work and in the townships. Since the 1973 workers revolt there has been a rapid growth of trade unions , particularly in the Durban and Pietermaritzburg areas of Natal. At the same time since the early 1980's there has been a similar growth (if not a linear one) in community organisations, projects and alternative structures. In the vanguard of these organisations have been the youth , who have either been unable to find work or who have dropped out of school, believing that the educational system is irrelevant to them.

The marginalisation of the youth has been aggravated by the endemic violence that has erupted in the Midlands region since

the mid - 1980's. Many explanations or theories have been put forward to provide some analysis of the violence in the region. The main ones will be critically analysed.

One of the most simplistic explanations which is also highly inadequate, is the view that holds it is a typical case of "black on black violence." (Hindson and Morrison 1: 1991) This position can be construed as blatantly racist for it succumbs to the myth of black savagery as a product of genetics ie blacks will kill each other because it is in their nature to do so.

The next position looks to ethnicity as an explanation, arguing that the violence is tribal\ethnic, where "Zulus are killing Xhosas" and vice versa. (Hindson and Morrison 5:1991) The arguments for black people committing ethnic genocide range from "tribal differences;" to the ANC version of Inkatha mobilising people on tribal lines or the Inkatha version of the ANC being dominated by communist Xhosas. (ibid. op cit) The deficiency in this analysis is that it does not account for the endemic violence within the Natal region which is populated by a majority of Zulu speaking people.

The dominant explanation of Inkatha is that the violence stems from socioeconomic conditions. However it makes no attempt to conceptually analyse these conditions but merely sets out a "shopping list " of socioeconomic conditions of deprivation in

order to create a large category of alienated youth susceptible to violence. They have identified this category as 'volatile youth' whom they argue are the instigators of the violence to which Inkatha members are responding. Thus they believe it is important for the ANC to discipline this layer.

Clearly this argument is flawed because it deflects all attention from the role of the warlords, vigilantes, the Kwa Zulu police etc. in the violence. This type of political rationalisation is used to acquit Inkatha of any culpability in the process. (Hindson and Morrison 3 :1991)

Contrary to this, the ANC supporters argue that the main causes of the violence are political competition and rivalry; that Inkatha uses violence to bolster its diminishing support base and to contest the ideological hegemony of the ANC over the Black populace. However once again, this argument also has its flaws in that it avoids looking at the offensive role of ANC supporters in this conflict, especially the undisciplined sectors of the youth in the violence.

The most often used explanation of the violence is that it stems from the State and this takes two forms, either directly attributing the violence to the action of the SADF, SAP or ZP; or to a "Third Force." (Hindson and Morrison 4 :1991) The role of the police historically has been to repress opponents of apartheid and this has led to a clash with township social

movements. The police have also collaborated with the Kwa Zulu police (ZP) in supporting Inkatha aligned factions and thereby intensifying township conflicts. With the developments after February 2 1990, there has been an attempt to redefine the role of the police and give it a more neutral peacekeeping function .

It is within this context that the concept of the "third force" that is facilitating violence, emerges. But it is difficult if not impossible to explain the endemic and spontaneous character of the violence in relation to agencies external to the main combatants in the violence. (ibid. op cit)

Finally the most commonly argued view sees apartheid as the root cause of the violence. However, to use apartheid as the explanation for the current outbreak of endemic violence raises the crucial question of why such a destructive cycle of violence has emerged at this point in time, when the demise of apartheid seems apparent, rather than for eg. 15 years ago ? For Hindson and Morrison (1991), the roots of the violence should be sought in the effects of the disintegration of apartheid rather than its continued implementation.

From the various literature on attempted explanations for the violence, Gwala (1989) presents the most clear, appropriate and well-thought out argument. After providing a profile of the Pietermaritzburg townships and the region, (spelt out in the beginning of this section) he goes on to state that the labour

movement had in fact created the space for mass mobilisation as they were more politically and organisationally mature than the community political structures. (Gwala 514:1989) For Gwala (ibid. :515), the turning point in the history of resistance and mass mobilisation in Edendale and Pietermaritzburg as a whole was the 1985 stayaway demanding the reinstatement of the Sarmcol workers. This marked the highpoint of community mobilisation by the UDF. and this was followed by consumer boycotts and the first May Day rally to be held in the region since the 1950's. The confrontation between Inkatha and the mass democratic movement was now beginning to rear its ugly head in Pietermaritzburg.

The real spark to have ignited the conflict was Inkatha's strategy of forcibly recruiting members and this started off a reign of terror in the Edendale community. It is worth noting that the actions of Inkatha have led to the formation of some of the most resilient and highly organised defence committees ever to have emerged in Natal. (Gwala 1989:516)

The formation of the UDF in 1983 tested Inkatha's tolerance for opposition beyond the limits because it posed a direct threat to the very existence of Inkatha as it was not only competing for the same membership as Inkatha but also organising in Natal; Buthelezi's 'constituency'. Pietermaritzburg also captures starkly the other characteristic of Inkatha post-1983, that of being caught in a deep cycle of violence. (Gwala 1989:519) It is

no longer able to freely mobilise without reprisals from aggrieved communities because of the trail of hostilities it leaves behind its violent actions. (ibid. op cit)

Undoubtedly, Pietermaritzburg is a thorn in the side of Inkatha in Natal precisely because it has been confronted by determined and widescale resistance to its attempts at domination. The region has also exposed the real basis of Inkatha's hegemony in Natal. As Gwala succinctly puts it,

The less successful its bureaucratic access to African communities and townships, the larger is its scale of violent attacks on the people. And this has become a vicious cycle. The less successful it becomes in crushing progressive organisations, the more it relies on the apartheid state for more bureaucratic and repressive apparatuses. (Gwala 1989:522)

Thus as a result of the increasing economic immiseration as well as the political violence, what was witnessed was a complete marginalisation of the black population of Pietermaritzburg, in particular the unemployed youth. It was within this context that the project was established and as a progressive cultural initiative, it was forced to respond to this marginalised layer in the region. Its primary constituency then was a marginalised populace which impacted upon the nature of the cultural programme but also upon which the cultural project itself impacted. The successes and failures of this project need then, to be understood within this context.

INITIAL STAGE

Initially a few concerned people got together to discuss ways of assisting the large number of youth who had become displaced because of the violence in the communities and who were thus unable to attend schools and lead 'normal lives.' The oppressed community of Pietermaritzburg was confronted with about 20 000 displacees, 75% of whom were youth and children. Many were without their families and others had been separated from their parents who remained in the villages and who were unable to make contact with their parents.

The concerned individuals formed themselves into a working committee and began by assisting with crisis intervention work ie. assisting the churches with distribution of food and blankets and servicing the centers where the displaced people were housed. At the time , the committee comprised 5 members and, gradually , this number increased to 11. There were individuals from WOSA, of which two were employed at the Trust for Christian Outreach. All of the WOSA participants were from the Cape region with a background in establishing cultural and civic forums to extend their active network. Other members from the Trust for Christian Outreach were from professional backgrounds (teachers, lawyers) who were broadly associated with the UDF and AZAPO. The activists from AZAPO had for the first time, in a number of years, been given a public platform in the Pietermaritzburg region. It is also important to note that the emergence of the cultural project

coincided with the establishment of the Pietermaritzburg branch of WOSA. The establishment of the project can then be interpreted as a strategic move by members of the branch to establish their presence in the Pietermaritzburg region.

The second aspect of the organisers work was to consult service organisations, education projects, community groups and churches with regard to setting up a joint working committee to provide the youth with educational and recreational support as well as providing a forum or basis from which the youth would be able to analyse and understand the causes of the violence. Needless to say, the Trust for Christian Outreach provided a network of contacts for the project with church, educational, and other community organisations. This was part of a broader effort made in the Pietermaritzburg region to reorientate youth to adjust to a culture of rebuilding their lives and to begin to grapple with problems of their survival.

In the initial stages the committee met frequently in order to plan and implement the project. After listing all the services that were being provided, it was decided by the committee that theirs was not simply a task to provide short-term help, but to provide a vehicle that would assist youth in giving expression to their talents, to assist them in exploring their creativity and, most importantly, to become independent and not sit around waiting for hand-outs and welfare. The influence of WOSA

activists can be noted here in relation to WOSA's commitment to what it sees as the empowerment and independence of the working class. This was attempted by providing and creating the infrastructure in order to facilitate this overall goal of empowerment and independence.

Representatives from the various displaced communities and existing organisations were invited to join this initiative and thereby broaden the existing committee.

ASSISTANCE RECEIVED

The Trust for Christian Outreach and Education (TCOE) provided the project with office space, furniture, tables, trestles, partitions as well as a telephone and access to transport and a temporary infrastructure. The project was housed in an old warehouse building at 73 Chapel Street, Pietermaritzburg, for which the rental was R1 200 per month. This venue was finalised in February 1990.

Initial financial assistance was given by HEWSSA (Health, Education, Welfare Society of South Africa) to establish the centre and to employ someone to co - ordinate the project. It also needs to be noted that the director of HEWSSA is well-known political and educational activist, Neville Alexander, whom WOSA activists in the project had direct access to. The negative implication, however, was that other funding agencies doors were closed as a result of the fact that WOSA activists played such a

prominent role within the project.

Thereafter, Medico International provided the funds. Apart from these two agencies , the centre has regular fund raising activities to raise money. In this way , the participants, cultural groups and the community were able to become involved in making small contributions to the running of the center.

* ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN

It was necessary to publicise and advertise the cultural centre in order to make it known to people. Part of the campaign involved organising a Cultural Opening Evening to which a number of musical and drama groups were invited so that the centre and its activities could be introduced to them. They were also informed that the centre was theirs to use should they require the facility. Adverts were placed in the Pietermaritzburg daily, The Natal Witness and letters were sent to other organisations introducing this project. Of all the responses received, the majority came from members of the community who were willing to get involved and learn different skills.

It was not long afterward , that another cultural evening was organised. A number of cultural groups, especially jazz groups, participated. During the cultural evenings, light snacks and drinks were sold as a fundraising strategy.

The motivation for these types of activities were two-fold. Firstly, it was felt that the center could become a venue for

people getting together. Thus the activities were designed to provide access to marginalised groups in order to expose their talents to the black communities of Pietermaritzburg. Secondly, these activities could be construed as a recruitment strategy for WOSA activists who clearly looked to the center for possible recruits for the organisation in order to build and consolidate their Pietermaritzburg branch.

INTERACTIONS BETWEEN PARTICIPANTS IN THE PROJECT

The management committee comprised individuals who were members of the various political traditions - AZAPO, WOSA, ANC\UDF. The primary reason behind this was the project's desire to project a non-sectarian face in the PMB region. This desire also manifested itself in the management committee's attempts to officially draw in all organisations into the projects public activities (e.g. June 16th, Children's' Day). These attempts were, however thwarted by the ANC, who refused to officially participate in the project.

Nevertheless, despite these organisational tensions the project was used by a diverse range of individuals, the majority of whom were affiliated to the Congress movement. The tension that did emerge at various points between Congress and AZAPO youth, was mediated and resolved by officials from the Trust for Christian Outreach. In this sense the attempts at non-sectarianism were largely successful. This then indicates that despite the fact

that the working class is not a homogeneous entity and is divided on ideological grounds, it can unite on broad criteria of struggling to survive under adverse conditions of violence and displacement.

SERVICING THE REFUGEES IN THE CAMPS

Whilst the project was still in its embryonic stages, the violence in the Midlands region broke out once again, upsetting the whole routine. Hundreds were killed, their properties were burnt, people were uprooted and displaced, and were cramped in churches and community halls in the Edendale area. Thereafter, the violence was sporadic. At one time it was believed to have abated, only to find that the Ashdown area was brutally attacked. In the midst of this violence, the Pietermaritzburg Community Arts Project survived and managed to organise a workshop on, among other things, the violence, where the youth as well as adults, themselves victims of the violence, attended and participated.

This workshop on the violence was very well attended and was especially useful to the staff of the project. This was so because immediately after the workshop, the project focused mainly on servicing refugees/ displacees in the various camps.

Since the violence erupted during the initial fledgling stage of the formation of the project, one of the first tasks was to get involved in the refugee crisis in Pietermaritzburg as there was a

serious shortage of resources as well as shelter for the displaced. This help consisted of :

1. Organising children in the refugee camps and they started attending art classes on Saturdays where they learnt drawing, painting , toy - making etc.
2. Organising Silk Screening and Leathercraft classes for adults from the refugee camps to attend.
3. Assisting two groups from FEDSEM refugee camps who were skilled in leather craft another two groups from the Thutuka Community Hall who were also skilled in Silk screening, to initiate their own projects.

NETWORKING

During the initial stages of the project, the following were approached :

1. Tatham Art gallery in Pietermaritzburg
2. University of Natal (PMB) Drama Department
3. Cosaw

Of all these , a very strong relationship has been forged with the Tatham Gallery's Education Officer, who has been most helpful and co-operative. Rightly or wrongly, others have refused to to work with the cultural project because of political allegiances and membership of political organisations different to those individuals on the working committee.

The following is a transcription of the working document which provided the guiding principles for the establishment of the project.

PREAMBLE

Noting the number of cultural groups in Pietermaritzburg that have emerged and disappeared because of the lack of supportive structures to service and strengthen them;

Further noting the vital role that culture plays in the lives and struggles of the oppressed masses for a free, democratic, non-racial and non-exploitative, united country;

Also noting in the context of the Pietermaritzburg violence which has caused untold destruction and suffering among the oppressed , cultural groups have played a very important task in creating a new political culture.

We therefore resolve to set up a cultural centre where groups and individuals can receive training and support as well as a venue for their performances.

PRINCIPLES

We are committed to the transformation of the present apartheid capitalist state and to work towards the building of a non-racial, democratic, non-exploitative, unitary South Africa. We are committed to working with all progressive organisations in the interests of the oppressed. We are also committed to the

strengthening of grassroots control of cultural activities.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 1.To provide training in different cultural spheres eg. art, music, drama, etc.
- 2.To service existing cultural groups by providing a back-up support service to cultural groups.
- 3.To train cultural workers to manage community - cultural projects.

STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONS

The cultural project will consist of the following committees :

- 1.The General Council which will be constituted in the following way:-

- (a) The executive of the coordinating committee
- (b) One representative from each of the users committees to be established e.g. Art committee (1 representative); Drama committee (1 representative)
- (c) Two representatives from the trainers committee

FUNCTION OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

The general council is the highest decision making body of the organisation. Consequently all policy matters as well as other issues regarding the direction of the organisation will be

discussed at this level. It was also decided that this body will meet at least once a quarter.

CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE/EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

(a) It will consist of individuals with special skills and talents as well as those active in promoting cultural activities..

(b) The full time organising staff will be members of this committee.

(c) The executive committee will consist of 9 members including a chairperson, secretary and treasurer.

FUNCTIONS

(a) It is responsible for fundraising for the project.

(b) It is responsible for promoting the centre amongst all sections of the community.

(c) It is responsible for carrying out decisions made at the general council.

(d) It is responsible for the day to day functioning of the centre.

This committee should meet as often as necessary, but not less than once a month.

USERS/PARTICIPANTS COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

This committee will be elected by the participants/trainees and users of the cultural centre.

FUNCTIONS

The participants committee will hold meetings whenever necessary,

but at least once a quarter, provided the meeting takes place before the quarterly of the general council.

TUTORS FORUM

The persons responsible for training in the different cultural forums will compose this committee.

FUNCTION

They will be responsible for co-ordinating their different training classes in such a way so as to promote the smooth functioning of the centre. In addition, they will also be responsible for determining the direction and content of the training courses.

They will meet whenever necessary but at least once a quarter provided the meeting takes place before that of the general council.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

This will take place not later than April every year and will be open to all members of the public.

AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

The project will appoint a firm of auditors to perform an audit of its financial records annually.

DISSOLUTION

Upon dissolution of the project, all assets will be donated to organisations with similar aims and objectives.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The primary research methodology employed was oral history - the use of oral sources of information by the researcher. But the very use of these sources raises fundamental issues especially those related to the reliability of the source- this is the first concern of the researcher. How does oral evidence compare with the modern historian's more familiar documentary sources ? (Thompson 1988 :1) A critique of the methodology will be embarked upon later. These critical questions will also be confronted later, but it should be noted that " they are better understood when placed within the wider context of the development of historical writing." (ibid.)

Thompson argues that oral history has most definitely made a contribution in providing new perspectives and opening up fresh fields of inquiry. (ibid.) Thus, sources of data were the individuals involved in establishing the project as well as the participants. A random sample of the participants was selected as the numbers were too large and time did not permit fruitful discussions with each and every participant. Since the methodology used was oral history, the data gathering techniques involved interviews and discussions. In addition, access to documented information was also given to the researcher. But it should be noted that for the purposes of this study , interviews formed the crux of data gathering. The following steps were taken

in terms of the research methodology in this study :

- 1) In the field - collecting oral data using interviews and documentation from the past
- 2) After the fieldwork - sifting and storing from the gathered data for the relevant information
- 3) Interpretation of the data
- 4) Findings and conclusion

It was relatively easy to gain access to both the participants and organisers of the project since the researcher was well-known to them. The researcher also explained the study that was being undertaken as well as the fact that interviews would be conducted with a random sample of the participants. It was possible to have interviews with all the organisers as they were, for obvious reasons, fewer in number. Moreover, it agreed that, upon completion of the final draft of the study, a copy would be given to the organisers as this could be utilised for fund-raising purposes (from companies like SHELL, BP, who would only be willing to assist if they had concrete data on the merits of the project)

In total, 30 interviews were conducted - 25 with participants and 5 with the organisers. All the interviews were unstructured and questions were open - ended. The reasons are obvious - there had to be no limitations or obstructions to responses, total spontaneity was called for. Apart from the interviews, group

discussions were also held. These helped to facilitate a spirit of openness amongst the participants because very often certain members were able to articulate very clearly that which others found difficult to express - this was clearly demonstrated by the common consensus accompanied by shouts of " That's what I mean!" or " That is what I am trying to say!" This was most evident in the discussion on self-empowerment. The problem here was in trying to simplify and get the meaning across to participants in terms of how they could " measure" the extent to which they become empowered through participation in the various activities and through the acquisition of certain skills.

The questions directed at the participants were focused around the following issues ;

- how they got involved with the project
- how they came to know about it ie through friends, advertisements or by chance
- how long they had been with the project
- which activities they participated in
- did they attend regularly barring transport and other problems
- did they believe that participation in the project has been beneficial to their development and how this was so
- would they be going back into their respective communities in order to impart their newly acquired skills to other interested members of the community

- how had the project helped in empowering them in the broadest sense; what had their own personal achievements been since joining the project
- had the events in the townships either directly or indirectly crept into their artistic and cultural activities
- did they have any problems with the project in terms of the structure , functioning and overall modus operandi.

The following questions were put to the co-ordinators/organisers:

- how did the project come to be established
- what was the motivation for the project
- how were the various activities that were to be offered, decided upon
- was funding a major problem and, if so , how was it overcome
- what is the structure of the project ie how is it organised in terms of the number of committees and their functions
- how were the tutors selected for the different activities that were being offered
- what links or contacts were made with the communities from which the participants came and what were the nature of these links (networking)
- why has the project been able to survive even in the face of the ravaging township violence that had taken place as well as the fact that, at times, they were faced with a severe shortage of funds
- does there appear to be a correlation between the content of

the cultural activities and the direct experiences of people in the townships and how was this demonstrated

- how successful have they been in terms of expanding the project
- have they been approached by other similar groups to liaise and work together on common issues
- has the project been a success in terms of the following :
 1. Empowering people (unemployment, self esteem and concept)
ie giving them a sense of purpose
 2. Imparting skills to them
 3. Unleashing the creativity and innovativeness of the users
 4. Uniting people from the same community

FINDINGS

Many of the participants initially became aware of the project through the advertisement campaign that was run by the organisers. Adverts were placed in the local newspapers, such as the Natal Witness and The Echo as well as in the city centre and in the Edendale Lay Centre. Others heard of the project through word of mouth ie. from friends who had noticed the adverts. Letters were also written to other organisations introducing this project but the response was poor.

In terms of duration of their participation , there were obviously people who had been with the project since its inception as well as others who had filtered in as the year drew on.

Of the activities that were offered, silk-screening , music lessons , drama , painting and drawing, children's art and pottery proved to be the most popular. When probing as to the reasons, the following were some of the responses :

Dumisani, (17) stated,

" I belong to an amateur band and need to improve my guitar playing. Formal lessons are too expensive and since I am unemployed, I cannot afford these lessons."

Themba, (22), said,

" My organisation needs people trained in silk-screening because we are trying to print T-shirts to sell at rallies and mass meetings. Here at the centre, Dennis is a professional artist and has been able to patiently teach myself and others like me the whole procedure."

This respondent was at pains to stress that they were not in competition with the silk-screening operation presently being run by the fired BTR Sarmcol workers and that had transport not been a problem, he would have tried to request some training assistance from them. Interestingly, those with whom the pottery lessons were most popular had entertained notions of setting up a small crafts business.

For Lufuno, (20),

"African art especially pottery is very expensive - just ask some of the ladies who sell their wares at the beach in Durban. Also many whites obtain these curios at dirtcheap prices, exploiting the artists , only to sell these items at big profits. Some of us are thinking about opening up a small store specialising in these

things but we only want to make enough money for our basic necessities. If we get jobs in the future, it will be better because then this can just be a nice pastime!"

Many of the youth who were interviewed, gave similar reasons for their choice of both drama and drawing.

Bheki, (18), states,

"We are frustrated. The violence has stopped us from attending school, we do not have money and some of our parents have lost their jobs. Until next year we need to do something with ourselves because we are very bored and angry. In fact some of the scholars have already decided that they are not going back to school next year. But me, I want to go back and finish because my mother wants me to do something after I come out of school so that I can help my family. You see, my father was killed three months ago and my mother works as a tea-lady for a business in town.

I always liked acting and now it seems to be a way in which I can use my energy properly while getting some skills. I have enjoyed the plays that we did about the "Tsotsis" in the townships because I was able to take out some of my anger at them - many of us and our families have also been victims of them."

Briefly, the play about the Tsotsis was the product of certain tenets in the townships at the time. During and after periods of violence, gangs like those called "The Boys from Imbali" had gone on a rampage in the different units of Imbali and Edendale. These acts were definitely not political in any way and there were attempts by Inkatha members to pin these criminal elements on the Progressive forces. These gangs were simply petty criminals and, at times, the nature of the felony was brutal - gang-rape as well as murder. However since the community was

terrified of them , no witnesses would come forward , nor would victims to lay charges.

Other plays which dealt with specific issues like Aids, rape and sexual abuse, were also performed. These were rudimentary experimentations with community theatre that were undertaken by the Drama group. It was felt that there was a need to educate the community on key issues that were of relevance to them. The idea of theatre as providing the tools for social action is fairly widespread in the Third World. Kid and Colletta (1981) have edited a collection of essays describing work in the field showing how in numerous countries performing arts play an important role in literacy programmes, unionisation, community health and many other fields of endeavour.

In South Africa, community theatre has become increasingly prominent since the 1980's and has been theorised as 'goal-oriented' (Blecher 1980). According to this position, theatre is seen as providing ways of solving problems which are specific to a particular community. Steadman (1985) documents the work done in the Winterveld squatter camp, where theatre was used to educate a community - not only to instill awareness , but also skills to act upon that awareness. Medical needs, problems of unemployment and education, the psychological effects of squatter life and many more issues were explored through the medium of theatre. According to Steadman (1985), theatre was functioning as

a consciousness-raising medium. Thereafter the project moved on to showing the community how to cope with the problems that were dramatised.

A similar project was undertaken with the Crossroads squatter community in 1983 in the Cape. A group, dramatising aspects of their lives as squatters, became known as the Squatter Players, and toured throughout the region, educating communities about the underlying causes of their plight. (Steadman 1985:527)

Both projects represented attempts to conscientise black communities through means that were alternative to the mass media. Kidd (1981 :281) conceptualised these methods in terms of 'folk media'. However it should be noted that the initiative did not come from the communities themselves but from cultural agents who entered these communities as outsiders and attempted to use the experiences of community members in order to educate them. Steadman (1985 :528) raises an important point when he states that these cultural agents who co-ordinate the experiments face a major ideological problem.

There is a fine line between theatre which shows the community how to survive in the system, and theatre which shows the community how to mobilise resources on the basis of a rejection of the system. The former reproduces the relations of domination and exploitation while providing means for the exploited to survive. The latter demystifies the relations of domination and exploitation, showing the exploited that their situation is caused not by any 'natural' order of things, but by the artifices of men and women and that they are therefore capable of alteration. (Steadman *ibid.*)

Cultural work thus appears to be crucial to a large section of the oppressed and exploited over the past few years. Not only has it been utilised among dwelling communities but also among the workers in order to highlight and expose the exploitation among other things, that takes place on the shopfloor. As the Cultural Group of the then FOSATU, interviewed by the South African Labour Bulletin stated, when asked how important cultural work is for them,

For us it has been important in three ways : (a) it takes a step , a small step towards pushing workers to start controlling their creative power. So far this power has been used by everybody in power and with money, for their own purposes; (b) it creates a better sense of unity amongst workers : poems, songs, plays etc. and the struggle to make them available to our brothers and sisters enriches us. We are not united because of need or hunger alone. (c) it educates people about our struggle and puts across a true picture of things- our picture. You see we are involved in this, however hard it is for us after work, because we believe that our struggle is not only there to destroy the oppressive powers that control us. It is there to also build a new world. To do this we must begin now. (SALB 1985: 72-73)

Drawing and children's art were also two of the most popular activities. In many ways , these two activities proved to be a form of therapy especially for those participants who had been victims of the violence. It was amazing to see how pictures drawn by four and five year olds , graphically depicted the violence in their particular areas. Every single picture had scenes related to the township war by way of guns, knives, blood , stick figures strewn about on the roads, police watching from casspirs etc. Of course, with the older children, the drawings were more clear and

accurate in their reflection of the violence. It was also very sad to see how, in many ways, these children had lost a huge part of their childhood, never to be found again. Often at these young ages, children tend to draw pictures depicting the usual "happy family" scene - mum, dad, siblings , the house and garden. Yet none of these had any semblance to the norm. All one noticed were the themes of death, destruction and poverty.

What was also quite fascinating was the attachment people had to the project. Quite often the centre was referred to as "our" project. When asked if they attended regularly, there was a unanimous affirmative answer. But of course, there was a problem with transport and money for the fare. Often a few members pooled together their meagre resources and managed to get into the city. Those whose parent(s) were employed, tended to help out with the money for the fare because as Sipho, (17), put it,

" My parents do not mind very much when I ask for taxi-fare to come to the centre because they know that I will be keeping busy and out of trouble. In our area, there are many of my age who have become pickpockets and I was asked if I would like to join. My parents have warned me about not getting involved and that is why they like me to go to the centre - they are at work till late and are scared that I may do something wrong."

It appears quite strongly that many of the responses and comments have a positive ring to them. The participants all seem to believe that the project has assisted them in various ways- from providing them with particular skills, to giving them a sense of purpose, to providing them with a place to come to besides

loitering about the streets, and most important of all, in empowering them in terms of teaching them skills, releasing their latent creativity and making them aware of the wider political, social and economic realities, and in the process, conscientising them to these realities.

As Jabulani, (19), so aptly put it,

"I used to think that to know about the struggle and about politics in this country was only for the activists because they belong to some organisation or the other. After getting involved in activities at the centre, it became clear that this was not true. Here we have a bunch of people, most of who were not actively involved in the struggle but yet in our drawings and discussions about plays, we kept focusing on the themes of oppression and exploitation of Blacks. Although it did not immediately make us want to join the ANC or any of the other groups, slowly we became aware that to be Black meant in this country that you must be aware of politics, of the exploitation etc. of the struggle. Even the workshops on the violence and others on women helped all of us to wake ourselves up and take notice of our situation more seriously."

There was also a sense of urgency amongst those who had learnt a particular skill like pottery or silk-screening, to go back to the community and impart this knowledge. Perhaps the primary reason for this was that there was some talk of trying to establish a co-operative which would sell these items. Knowing full well the various problems associated with co-operatives, the co-ordinators subsequently held a workshop on this subject which was most beneficial in terms of making people aware of the dynamics and the complexities of running co-operatives in South Africa.

PROBLEMS

One issue that came up on a number of occasions from discussions with the participants was that the violence in the region created tremendous instability and this periodically made it very difficult for the participants to get to the centre. At one stage burning barricades were placed along the Edendale road which is the main route to the city.

Language was also seen as a problem especially with tutors who were unable to speak an African language. This made it necessary to have on hand someone who could translate the particular tasks being done or skill being taught to those who had difficulty in speaking and understanding English.

Some participants felt that there was a danger the project might become too bureaucratic in terms of the number of committees within the structure and that, ideally, it should become more streamlined.

Participants who were active within a particular political tendency on the left expressed concern at the sectarianism that was emerging from certain quarters in the townships because this project was set up by people from the Workers Organisation for Socialist Action (WOSA).

ORGANISERS RESPONSES

According to the co-ordinator, Marcia, a group of concerned members of the community came together to discuss the idea of

this project because it was felt that such a structure was sorely needed in the Pietermaritzburg region. Their main objective was to help marginalised youth acquire some skills and become self-sufficient if possible. The centre was also going to reach out to victims of the violence as well as the school drop-outs.

Structure of the project

The co-ordinating committee which runs the project comprises a chairperson, vice-chair, secretary, treasurer, plus three other members who co-ordinate the tutors, as well as teach users themselves. This committee meets once every fortnight to discuss issues related to the general running of the project, funding or any problems that may have arisen.

For each of the activities there is one skilled tutor - a total of eight tutors. There is also a Tutors' Forum which comprises all tutors. Their function is to work together in terms of giving direction to the project by way of the specific skills that they impart to the users. They also workshop ideas together with the co-ordinator in terms of the content of their courses.

Once a year the Annual General Meeting is held at the center. The first part of the AGM is cultural programme where a play is performed or music played or a demonstration of dance takes place. Thus all groups using the centre put on items. The second part is the formal meeting wherein the progress, the financial situation and other related matters are tabled.

At the end of the year during the December vacation, the centre holds an Open Day with a full cultural programme. This runs simultaneously with the center's ART IN THE PARK , where there is an exhibition of the all the works of art that were created during the year.

ACTIVITIES 1990\1991

The activities that were decided upon were directly linked to goal-setting in that the organisers had envisaged certain goals being achieved at the end.

SETTING GOALS

The organisers of the project had set for themselves several short term objectives. The primary aim of this was to assist the organisers with the evaluation process that would take place at regular intervals, as well as to ensure that the various activities earmarked for the project would be undertaken. The following were the goals set by the project :

- To establish a centre where displaced and other youth could seek advice, come for counseling and be given support in order to assist them in reconstructing and regaining control over their lives.
- To provide elementary educational programmes which would assist the youth in completing their education.
- To provide skills training that can be effectively used by participants to generate income and set up self help groups.

- To provide basic training that would allow the youth to expose their creativity through the medium of art, drama, music, etc.
- To provide a centre where local cultural groups, associations, etc. can exhibit their work and perform for the community.
- To encourage professionals to make their skills available as well as share their experiences with local groups e.g. drama, music.

For the medium term it was decided to initiate a one year training programme and courses for the community cultural workers who would then assist with training in the community. This of course would enable the centre to reach reach a wider range of groups in both the rural and urban areas. Beyond this , the organisers wished to reproduce activities of the center in other areas utilising church halls etc.

Of course these also depended to a large extent on the availability of tutors who were also trying to juggle their time between various commitments. Another factor that affected the regular continuation of classes was a lack of transport as some members simply could not afford the public transport from the townships. It was this latter point that forced upon the organisers a rethink of the location of the project. Since a venue was most difficult to find in the township, the organisers adopted a strategy whereby those members who had acquired the

skills in his/her particular field of interest, would go back and set up classes in the community, at an individuals home in order to continue this process.

In addition to the above , several workshops were conducted on the violence, setting up self-help groups, community theatre , and first-aid programmes. Speakers were invited to talk on a variety of topics e.g. destroying a culture of violence or the role of youth in rebuilding the communities.

The programmes are structured and youth enroll for the various courses offered. Other programmes such as children's art are conducted every Saturday for organised children's groups. The center was also used daily by the NECC to conduct formal classes for standard 6,7 and 8 pupils who could not attend schools in their area because of the violence.

Among some of the workshops which were attended by approximately 100 youth, were the following :

- violence and peace
- education crisis
- women and violence
- culture in society
- setting up of cultural groups
- community theatre

On days of political significance to the oppressed masses, e.g.

May Day or June 16th, cultural programmes are held , with several organisations participating. To celebrate International Children's day, the children's group together with the Trust for Christian Outreach and the Community Care Center, held a programme 3000 odd children and their parents attended.

EVALUATION

According to the co-ordinator, Marcia, this project has been a success in some senses only, the reason being that funding is always a problem, and also that any outbreak of violence directly affects the users. It has been successful especially in terms of teaching skills to the youth, getting them off the streets and engaged in interesting activities. In fact , the pottery and silkscreening group have thus far been the most successful - they have subsequently become income generating and the pottery group has applied for funds and accommodation from the Craft Association.

The first silkscreening group has already begun printing their own T-shirts in Imbali for their organisations. Another group of silkscreeners from the centre have begun their own silkscreening project in Sobantu but they are experiencing difficulties in raising funds.

The University of Natal's (PMB) Fine Arts students had volunteered to assist the pottery group at the center after hearing about their efforts. Two kilns have already been built.

They are also assisting the centre to raise funds or find a sponsor in order to purchase an electric kiln to facilitate the production of dishes which can be easily marketed and sold.

The Community Care Center, which falls under the Trust for Christian Outreach, has direct links with the center's programmes for children's art. Most of the children who belong to the centre have been referred by the TCOE, who have also done crisis intervention work in the townships during the violence.

Another major achievement was the ability of the centre to secure two bursaries for two highly talented youth from the project. They are now with the Africa Cultural Center in Johannesburg and according to progress reports, are faring very well. The overall summation given was that previously unemployed youth, youth who had for various reasons dropped out of school, as well as those who were victims of the violence (including the children), have gained confidence as well as skills through coming to the centre. It must not be forgotten that some of the work done at the centre dealt with counseling refugees from the townships as well as with helping set up support structures with other organisations to assist in accommodating and feeding the refugees. This has definitely helped the centre to achieve a credible standing in the eyes of the community and with that, to gain its confidence.

However, the organisers of the project are still trying to link the cultural project to education in a concrete way because they

realize that their constituency is mainly students, unemployed and marginalised youth in the greater Pietermaritzburg area. Many of the high school dropouts were simply not employable because of their lack of skills, a deficiency which makes them highly unmarketable in an already depressed economy wracked by the present recession. They obviously need to complete their schooling and the centre would like to provide them study with facilities, academic support from specialist tutors, literacy, language and learning skills. Here the organisers expressed a serious need to co-operate or network with other organisations working with youth in order to host forums where these ideas could be developed. The centre has made links with the NECC which uses the center to host Saturday classes for their students.

It is hoped that through this kind of service, would come a spin-off into adult education which needs to be developed for many of the older people from the townships. Thus, this type of involvement by the centre, cannot be said to be divorced from peoples lives in the wider community. As Marcia says,

"If people have no jobs, it becomes difficult for them to get involved in cultural activity because bread and butter issues are their first priority. So, for example, to get to the centre requires that they have to hustle for the fare; they are also worried about their next meal; some do not have accommodation because of the violence etc. For the project to be meaningful, it has to have a much more developmental perspective."

The project has managed to survive despite the odds being stacked against it. According to Rita,

"In the context of the violence in PMB, and the fact that communities have gone through a tremendous amount of demoralisation, constantly fearing for their lives etc. the centre has played a role in providing some sort of support structure for them. Despite the demoralisation, they have still managed to achieve many of their objectives, judging from the number of people and groups who have responded to the Open day , other cultural programmes and the various workshops that were held."

The main problems with the project have been summarised as follows ;

1.Financial

Funding has always been a problem from the inception of the project. They have to date relied on donations from TCOE by way of used furniture and cash . In trying to market the project, they have come up against resistance from some political organisations because they refuse to affiliate to any one particular political stream, arguing that their membership stems from a variety of political tendencies. Moreover if this were to occur , then acceptance by the community would be difficult.

Insufficient funds seem to be a common ailment of cultural organisations and projects in this country. This problem has, of late, been exacerbated by the so-called political changes taking place in South Africa because foreign funders are no longer giving assistance to these groups as they did in the past.

A recent article in the New Nation spelt out this particular problem facing cultural organisations and concluded that "the

money is drying up." (New Nation , Culture Supplement, (6/3/92).

New Nation maintains that,

Cultural organisations, who face a bleak future because foreign funds are rapidly drying up , have been spurred into serious soul-searching and a re-evaluation of their strategies....

The message to cultural organisations across the land is clear - now that South Africa is rejoining the rest of the world, our cultural organisations have to get their acts together, streamline their activities and co-ordinate their efforts. (ibid.)

2. Lack of skilled tutors

This has been linked to two factors - sectarianism and funding. Certain individuals who had particular skills and where approached, refused to assist because the project was not affiliated to the dominant political tendency. Second, because of a lack of funds, many of the skilled people who were approached felt reticent to work in the knowledge that money was tight.

3. Lack of a full-time director - this, of course, is also linked to the lack of funds. The people employed lack confidence because they have little experience in the job. They also tend to lack initiative in the sense that they are unable to make decisions in urgent situations if the committee is unavailable. Thus, the co-ordinating committee members who are also employed on a full-time basis elsewhere, have a problem of constantly monitoring the project. They have tried to overcome this difficulty by encouraging those working at the centre to develop a greater

self-confidence by means of vesting them with responsibilities.

4. Assisting the community

The initial conception was that the project was also to act as a training school and part of the obligation of the users to the centre , was to go back into the community and train others. But this has not worked as planned, once, again because of the lack of funds. Thus, it is virtually impossible to replicate this in the community if there is a lack of the necessary resources.

ISSUES OF CONCERN

Reflections on the experience of the project raises a number of issues of concern for cultural activists. The first of these is the prominent role of WOSA activists who clearly saw themselves as pioneering an independent project. Clearly these activists located the project within the framework of their political goals and used it as a recruiting ground for the establishment and consolidation of their branch. This then poses the issue of the right of political activists to pioneer or establish cultural forums to serve their own political ends.

One implication of this for the project was that it was seen to be established by people from a narrow ideological tradition and this led to it being "boycotted" by activists from the ANC and other Congress-aligned organisations. This of-course impacted negatively on the project in that it narrowed its funding base as well as affected its legitimacy.

This then raises the second issue related to empowerment. The project did empower WOSA activists by providing them with a network to Black communities as it did AZAPO by giving them access to public forums. The implication is that this made the project a politically contested terrain between political activists and parties. Pearlman (1980:20) argues that empowerment is defined by people gaining an understanding of and control over social, economic and or political forces in order to improve their standing in society. She states that involvement in the planning, execution and reflection on the activities are integral to the learning process. (ibid.) Furthermore there needs to be a climate of tolerance where members are supportive of those who may be ignorant or disagree. Thus confrontation plays a role in the learning process and there could always be a type of constructive confrontation that leads to new ideas emerging and ultimately to more efficient or better management of the project, thereby benefiting both organisers as well as participants.

With the project itself, there was often this type of constructive conflict between the organisers whom each at times had different or opposing ideas on the direction of the project. Yet in retrospect, this resulted in strengthening the project because of the positive compromises that were inevitably reached.

One of the characteristics that Pearlman presents in her approach to empowerment deals with the transfer of responsibilities from

the organisers to the participants. Clearly this did not occur to the extent that the organisers yearned for, as the participants were submissive to the ideas from them. Even the tutors seemed to be experiencing the same problem. The individual in charge of the day to day running of the center was unable to take decisions in a crisis situation or when the organisers were away, even though he had been mandated to do so. Thus to an extent , self-management of the project was defeated. But can such self-management occur in the context of a lack of skills and a network of funding ? With the activists moving to other projects or relocating to other provinces or regions, the project was rendered helpless, once again due to a lack of skills and an inability to fundraise for the project. Skills were not transferred and this became evident with the movement of the key organiser to Cape Town.

Two related issues emerge in respect of the funding of the project. SHELL provided a small amount of money after being approached, but attempted to curtail the activities of the project by restricting the use of funds to literacy classes. Clearly there was an attempt to control the direction of the project. Secondly, the activist layer of WOSA (due to expertise and contact networks) were direct fundraisers for the project. This empowered them to retain control of the political direction of the project. It also ensured that upon their movement to other regions or projects, the cultural project did not have

sufficiently skilled people to continue fundraising.

These experiences raise two general concerns for all cultural activists. The first of these is how do cultural projects avoid being manipulated by funders who control the purse strings necessary for the survival of the project ? But it also poses the issue of the dominance of activists rather than the users in the fundraising of cultural projects. How do cultural activists ensure that fundraising for these projects does not become their sole preserve or that of other political activists ? How and under what conditions can users of cultural projects be empowered to fundraise for these projects ? Satisfactory answers to these questions and others raised in this study are essential if the survival and consolidation of alternative cultural projects in this country is to become a realistic possibility.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Man will make it his purpose to master his feelings, to raise his instincts to the heights of consciousness, to make them transparent, to extend the wires of his will into hidden recesses and thereby raise himself to a higher plane...

It is difficult to predict the extent of self-government which the man of the future may reach or the heights to which he may carry his technique. Social construction and psycho-physical self-education will become two aspects of one and the same process. All the arts - literature, drama, painting, music and architecture - will lend this process a beautiful form. More correctly, the shell in which the cultural construction and self-education of man will be enclosed, will develop all the vital elements of contemporary art to the highest point. Man will become immeasurably stronger, wiser and subtler; his body will become more harmonised, his movements more rhythmic, his voice more musical. The forms of life will become dynamically dramatic. The average human type will rise to the heights of an Aristotle, Goethe, or a Marx. And above this ridge new peaks will rise. (Trotsky 1991, 284)

Following the preceding discussions, some long-winded, time has approached for the study to be drawn to a close. In order to do so, it is necessary to summarise briefly what we have studied. Thereafter, a few salient issues which have relevance for cultural studies and criticism, will be teased out. It is hoped that these will bring us, finally to a statement of the significance of this undertaking.

Chapter One - This study began with a discussion of theoretical issues which have a direct bearing on the study of culture. From

the opening discussion, it was concluded that the use of critical theory would best serve the interests of this study. It was concluded that not only must criticism interpret but also explain. Moreover it was also noted that studies on culture almost always seem to bring with it the biases and values of the researcher.

Chapter Two : This was followed by a discussion on the work of Gramsci on culture and hegemony. It was shown that the concept of 'hegemony,' as spelt out in his many writings, could be deemed to be one of the most sophisticated analyses in its relation and application to studies on culture.

The latter half of this chapter was devoted to wrestling with the rather controversial argument on the concept of a 'working class culture.' It was concluded after an extensive review of particular works of Trotsky, that we cannot speak of a working class culture per se; that at the end of the day we must strive to achieve not a culture pertinent to any one class as such, but rather a human culture.

Chapter Three : The focus of this chapter was on the actual study that was conducted on the Pietermaritzburg Community Arts Project. The historical background showed how the Pietermaritzburg region has, in fact, been a community under siege during the late 1980's in the context of the political violence that has wreaked death and destruction upon thousands of

families in the townships. It was concluded that, despite the numerous obstacles ranging from the political violence, lack of adequate funding, dire economic status of the members etc. the project was still able to survive. Moreover, it had succeeded in helping the users themselves by way of teaching them skills, providing crisis counselling for those afflicted by the violence and by restoring their self-confidence and self esteem.

This study has in a small way attempted to contribute to that never-ending process of scholarship - the assessment of recorded cultural traditions. The history of culture has always been a history of dualisms between mainstream traditions and avant - garde or alternative representations. Unfortunately, the former tend to receive the attentions of the dominant group which sustains them, while the latter are often marginalised by that group. This is evidenced by the lack of support for cultural groups which are struggling to emerge and to survive if they are lucky enough to get off the ground. A clear record of the history of these alternate cultural forums will only emerge when the established tradition of culture in South Africa, signified by what was stated in the very beginning of this study - the notion of "doing - of for example, going to the theataah " (Tomaselli 1987 :3), is evaluated in the light of the alternatives that have emerged in this country through the resistance struggles of the disenfranchised populace of South Africa.

What has been recorded in this study , are the activities of a

small (by conventional standards) cultural project within the system of a dominant culture in South Africa. As many researchers have stated in studies on culture, this has been achieved by a process of sensitivity which favours certain elements in that tradition above others. (Steadman 1985 : 520) Steadman in his study on drama and social consciousness makes the following important point,

Alternatives such as black middle-class drama, working-class theatrical innovations, drama based on African mythology and history, didactic political theatre and popular musical entertainment have all received scant attention in scholarly accounts of South African culture. These alternatives to the established record have to be unearthed. It is the task of reconstruction in which the veils of prejudice and elitism have to be drawn apart so that important milestones in South African theatrical history can be salvaged. (ibid.)

In this particular research undertaking, the study is also guilty of a similar kind of scholarly distortion. The major contribution to this has been that processes of selection have been invoked and this has inevitably led to the omission of other works or projects that could also boast cultural significance.

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INTERVIEWS

Interviews were held with the following participants between September and October 1991 :

Dumisani 17yrs
Themba 22yrs
Lufuno 20 yrs
Bheki 18 yrs
Sipho 17yrs
Jabulani 19 yrs

Mbuso 23 yrs
Rita 49 yrs
Marcia 33 yrs

DOCUMENTS AND REPORTS

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Proposals for funding of the project submitted to HEWSSA, Medico
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