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The recent development of South African short film making

Archer, Nicholas Paul

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THE RECENT DEVELOPMENT

OF

SOUTH AFRICAN SHORT FILM-MAKING

A research report submitted to the Faculty of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Johannesburg, 2005.

Abstract

South Africa's film industry presently has huge, unrealised potential for growth. Currently one of the most vibrant sectors of the local industry is short film-making. This research's main contention is that, for a number of reasons the short form is the most viable form for film-making development to take. The short film's value as a training tool and essential building block for local film-making is scrutinized. To this end the research incorporates a content and form analysis of selected short films, with special reference made to the modes and economic conditions of production that affect the film industry. To conclude, I take the position that film-making, as a form of artistic and cultural dialogue, has tremendous possibilities for the development of a national identity, the creation and perpetuation of local myths and the fostering of social cohesion. For these reasons the short form is worthy of more concerted institutional support.

Declaration

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

Nicholas Paul Archer
2005

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Introduction

This research report is focussed specifically on the development, and current status of short fiction film-making in South Africa. Its main concern is with the conditions of production that influence local short film-making, and with those social and economic factors that either inhibit or promote the making of short films. The research looks in particular at the short film's advantages as a training and development vehicle. Further, this report sees the promotion of the short film as critical for a successful local film-making industry. In this regard, a number of initiatives are scrutinised, with particular attention being paid to *New Directions* and *The Short and Curlies*.

This research examines the short film from two angles. It explores the conditions of film production – the ideological and socio-economic context of local film-making – as well as the films themselves; what they signify, and how they inform the film industry as a whole. Short film-making is seen as a microcosm of the greater film industry, and as an indicator of current and future trends.

Of particular interest is the divide between institutional and independent filmmakers, especially with regards to thematic, aesthetic and narrative trends. The effect of institutional control over modes of production is also explored. Other issues concerning the short film such as financing and distribution have been integral in this report's findings.

This report does not focus on television drama series or documentaries, but is rather concerned exclusively with short fiction films, up to thirty minutes in length.

Chapter One Legacy

In looking at the current status of South Africa's film industry, it is important to first consider its legacy, which undoubtedly still affects film and video production today.

South Africa has a long film history, which begins as early as 1895, with the first viewings of moving images through the Kinetescope. Local newsreels and short films that were taken of local cities were shown. It was not long before dramas were being made.[1] The most significant events to influence the current state of South Africa's film industry started in 1931, with the passing of The National Censorship Act and the Entertainment Act. These acts required that "all cinematic material" be reviewed and cleared before it was allowed to be shown to the South African public. The passing of the Acts, combined with the formation of the Censor Board in 1934[2] were the beginning of the strict governmental control of film industry content, which would last until the end of the Nationalist Government. In 1956 a group of filmmakers, including Jamie Uys, persuaded the government to create a subsidy scheme for South African film-making. Its primary aim, according to a report by the Arts and Culture Task Group (ACTAG), was "to foster conservative populist themes."[3] Most of the films that were made were Afrikaans, and aimed at promoting Afrikaans culture and nationalism. The scheme aimed to stimulate film-making by providing tax rebates based upon

[1] For more detailed articles on the history of South Africa's film industry, look at

- "The South African Film And Television Industry Report." Report for *The Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, November* 1998. Pp. 40-42. Downloaded from www.gov.za/reports/1998/mso1a2.pdf
- Suttner, E. "History Of South African Film – Looking Back, Looking Forward", *SA History*, 2003. Available URL: http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/artsmediaculture/pages/film-tv/film-history1.htm
- Tomaselli, K. "Cinema on Periphery: South Africa (1910-1995)", 1997. Downloaded from http://www.und.ac.za/und/ccms/publications/articles/cinemasa.htm

[2] Suttner, E. "History Of South African Film – Looking Back, Looking Forward", *SA History*, 2003. Available URL: http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/artsmediaculture/pages/film-tv/film-history1.htm

[3] The ACTAG report, Chapter 9 page 289. Quoted in "The South African Film And Television Industry Report." Report for *The Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, November* 1998. Pp. 40. Downloaded from www.gov.za/reports/1998/mso1a2.pdf

audience attendances, which were often fictionalised to enable filmmakers to claim money fraudulently. Eight hundred feature films were produced under the so called "24 (f)" rebate scheme, which is famous for the amount of fraud that was carried out under the guise of 'film-making.' (c.f. Suttner, CIGS Report, Botha) Due to the get-rich-quick attitude of many filmmakers under the subsidy scheme, little money went into development. "… producers set out to make films for subsidy's sake … [m]any of the films produced during the 60s were of extremely poor quality."[4]

In 1974 another scheme was established for the funding of films made for black audiences, called the Subsidy B scheme.[5]

> "*"Based on the principle of "separate but equal development", a number of "black" films were produced […] They tended to promote a "feel good" attitude and had little or no political comment on the state of black people in the country. The subsidies given to both English and so called Bantu films were considerably lower than that given to Afrikaans films"*"[6]

The separate subsidy systems fragmented the industry further. Any film that challenged the Censorship Board's guidelines or the government's policies would not have been subsidised. As a result films that were politically critical were few and far between. Few films that reflected or commented on the political situation of the time were made. Films that did make political statements were films such as *Katrina* (Jans Rautenbach, 1969) or *Boesman en Lena* (Ross Devenish, 1973).

Despite the constraints affecting film production, notable work was still produced. In 1987 one of South Africa's most successful anti-apartheid films, *Mapantsula* (Oliver Schmitz) was made. According to the FRU it has sold 60 000 units on

[4] Tomaselli, K. "The Role and Function of SAFFTA in the South African Feature Film Industry", *The Saftta Journal, 1(1), 1980*, Available URL: http://www.und.ac.za/und/ccms/amp/articles/saffta.htm

[5] For a good overview and analysis of the "Bantu" film scheme, read Harriet Gavshon's article "Levels of intervention in Films made for African Audiences in South Africa", *Critical Arts Volume 2(4*), (1983). Available URL: http://www.und.ac.za/und/ccms/publications/criticalarts/v2n4a3.htm and Tomaselli, K. "The Role and Function of SAFFTA in the South African Feature Film Industry", *The Saftta Journal, 1(1), 1980*, Available URL: http://www.und.ac.za/und/ccms/amp/articles/saffta.htm

[6] De Barros, L. Quoted in "The South African Film And Television Industry Report." Pp. 40.

video in the rest of Africa.[7] In the eighties more films which challenged the apartheid status quo started to surface. Films such as Manie van Rensburg's *The Road to Mecca*, *Die Storie van Klara Viljee*, and *The Fourth Reich*, and Darrel Roodt's *Place of Weeping*, *The Stick* and *Jobman*[8] are a few examples. Ross Devenish's *A Chip of Glass Ruby* (1982) was from the *Six Feet of the Country* series of short films, which were all based upon the works of Nadine Gordimer.

In 1992 when the subsidy scheme was stopped, there was a serious lack of development of the local market, especially in the areas of distribution and marketing. However, there was development of the local film and video production infrastructure. There are many skilled technical professionals in the country today, making South Africa a viable and successful location for overseas productions. Despite this, the apartheid legacy is still felt particularly in the creative sector, which shows the imbalances set in motion by the previous government. South Africa produces very few local films each year. There is still a shortage of local creative talent, which is partially to blame for the country's low film output.

[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid. Suttner.

Chapter Two The state of the industry at the moment

Short film-making is a small component of a large local television and film production industry and is therefore subject to the conditions and influences of the industry as a whole. In order to review the status of short film-making in South Africa, it is important to look at its context – the local film industry – in general.

Latest reports value the local film and television industry at R 5, 8 billion[9] per annum. The Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) estimates that the film and video production sector currently contributes less than two percent to the total economy, (cf. CIGS report, p 61) but also predicts that this figure is set to "reach 10% during the next 10-15 years."[10] The film industry has a large sphere of economic influence, which results in positive spin-offs for other industries too. Many other enterprises such as catering and car hire services benefit from the local film industry. The 'multiplier effect' refers to the amount of this economic spin-off that occurs. It has been calculated that a film that is produced locally has a multiplier effect of 2, 8 times.[11] That is, for every Rand spent on the local production of a feature film R 2, 80 is spent in other support industries. The film and television industry is also very labour intensive, and it has been stated that 100 local jobs are created for every movie made.

The powerhouse of the local industry is in Gauteng, with the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), M-Net and many production companies situated there. 85% of all of Africa's production facilities are based in Gauteng[12] and predictably this is where most of the local production takes place.[13] The

[9] "The South African Film And Television Industry Report." Pp. 69.
[10] "South African film survey", *Hollywood Reporter*, 4 November 2003. Available URL: http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/thr/international/feature_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=2016502
[11] Izidor Codron, quoted in Marrs, D. "Cape Town Poised for Miami Vice Effect", Business Day (Johannesburg). Posted at *allAfrica.com*, 12 August 2004. Available URL: http://allafrica.com/stories/200408120397.html
[12] Jackman, T. "Wrapped in SA Film Industry in Crisis", *SA Film*, No Date Given. Available URL: http://www.safilm.org.za/interviews/interview.php?uid=171
[13] 77% of local production, according to "The South African Film And Television Industry Report." Ibid.

majority of the remaining production takes place in the Western Cape, particularly in Cape Town. Much of this work is for overseas commercials and feature films. Cape Town has been favoured by international production companies for a number of reasons, but particularly because it has a wide range of film locations, favourable weather and long daylight hours in the summer, making the region more cost-effective. The value of the Rand relative to other currencies has also been a major factor in the country's facilitation success in recent years. This factor has been changing recently, with the Rand's relatively good performance against the US Dollar.

Cape Town saw a dramatic increase in production in recent years. Martin Cuff, head of the Cape Film Commission (CFC) said that there were more shoots in the first three months of 2002 than the entire previous year, and that Cape Town had quadrupled the number of permits issued in the period from 2000 to 2002. Cape Town was rated as having the fifth-busiest film industry in the world in 2003.[14] Cuff attributed this to the exchange rate at the time – there was a sharp decline in the value of the Rand at the beginning of 2002 – and in part to South Africa being considered a relatively safe international destination after the 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States. Cuff cited a 140% increase in the number of feature films shot in Cape Town in 2003, compared with 2002.[15] As a result South Africa's facilitation industry has enjoyed unprecedented success in recent years, especially in overseas productions. However, Cuff said that despite the Rand's recovery from its slump at the beginning of 2002,[16] local production companies' prices remained at their adjusted rates, many of which are dollar based. The prices continued rising by 10% each year on top of that, and Cuff mentioned that some producers estimate that it was 46% more expensive to film in Cape Town in 2003 than the previous year. He cited an example of a Los Angeles producer, who told him that equipment hire in Cape Town was costing R 40 000, whereas in the US it would have cost him the equivalent of only R 12 000. Location fees

[14] Jordaan, M. "Movies: CT too expensive?", *News24.com*, 8 April 2004. Available URL: http://www.news24.com/News24/Entertainment/Local/0,,2-1225-1242_1509912,00.htm
[15] "South African film survey", *Hollywood Reporter*
[16] On the 2nd January 2002 the Rand was trading at R18 to one Pound. Source: *x-rates.com* http://www.x-rates.com/cgi-bin/hlookup.cgi

have been known to be twice as much as those in North America. What is increasingly being referred to by industry professionals as the 'greed factor' could ultimately mean that Cape Town – and South Africa in general – loses the bulk of overseas production work to other countries with weaker currencies and more competitive price structures. Apart from the high fees charged by local agencies, the costs of getting to South Africa are higher than for some of the other options such Argentina, Mexico or Eastern Europe, which are closer to the United States. These factors all put the industry at risk of losing valuable foreign income. South Africa is also losing business to New Zealand, Australia, Ireland and Canada.[17] There are signs that the Cape film industry is already in a cool-down period because of this. The Commercial Producers Association estimates the drop at 30%, compared with production in the previous year. (2003)[18]

The price increases must surely also negatively affect local filmmakers, who are most probably unable to afford the inflated prices. The market is already difficult to enter for new independent filmmakers. "Increased concentration of ownership has led to higher barriers to entry for new entrants into the global industry."[19] It was estimated that less than 15 production companies produce more than 90% of all feature film and television productions in South Africa, although there are currently more than 150 registered producers in the country.[20] These barriers mean that many new players are not getting the exposure they could benefit from.

There is however, a lot of goodwill in the local industry, and professionals are usually more than willing to assist with low budget productions. A large number of local films are produced on very low budgets, with people working for free, or accepting deferred payment. Due to their non-commercial nature, short films frequently have to rely on this goodwill from the industry. Unfortunately,

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[17] Ibid. Marrs.
[18] Beukes, L. "Locations: South Africa." *The Hollywood Reporter.com.* 17 August 2004. Available URL: http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/thr/international/feature_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1000613204
[19] "The South African Film And Television Industry Report." Pp. 10.
[20] PricewaterhouseCoopers (2000) "Film Industry Survey" for the (then) Department of Arts, Culture, p21. Available from http://www.nfvf.co.za

goodwill aside, professionals are usually only willing to work for free when there is no other paying work around, such as in the off season or when there is an oversupply of crew at the time. Should Cape Town's production rate drop further, it could actually assist local film-making because there would be more of this oversupply. Production companies would have to find work locally, and the prices would drop. However this would negatively affect the industry as a whole. The local industry can only be successful if it is self-sustaining. Dependency on facilitating overseas productions means that South Africa will always be subject to external factors, such as the exchange rate and other market forces. The solution to South Africa's low production rates must come from within the local industry.

Distribution

South African film distribution has been limited historically as a result of apartheid in both the international and local spheres. Internationally, the cultural boycott and sanctions isolated South Africa from the rest of the world, whilst locally distribution infrastructure and exhibition development was predominantly limited to the white sector of the population. This occurred both in terms of cinematic release and public broadcasting.

According to a report produced by PricewaterhouseCoopers, in 1999 there were 530 screens in 73 cinemas in South Africa.[21] Currently Ster-Kinekor alone has 700 local screens. According to the company, it represents 60% of the local market[22] but the PricewaterhouseCoopers report states it has 18 out of the estimated 24 million total cinema attendances per year, or 75 percent of the market. The PricewaterhouseCoopers report also stated that there was an estimated television viewership of 14 559 000 in 1999, and that it was growing at

[21] Ibid. PricewaterhouseCoopers . Pp. 20
[22] Interview with Helen Kuun, Ster-Kinekor

an annual rate of 13 percent per annum. This growth has positive implications for South African production companies.

There is a perception that South African films are not popular with local audiences. Indeed, generally many local films do not succeed at the box office, especially when compared with Hollywood imports.[23] Moonyeenn Lee, a prominent local film industry figure said, "Audiences don't have any confidence in South African films – they last about a week and then the cinema companies pull them off."[24] The exception to this statement is Leon Schuster's films, which have had a number of local box office hits, such as *Panic Mechanic* (David Lister, 1996) and *Mr Bones*, (Gray Hofmeyr, 2001). Both films broke local box office records when they were released in South Africa. Schuster's most recent film, *Oh Shuks, I'm Gatvol* (Leon Schuster, Willie Esterhuizen, 2004) earned an opening weekend gross of "R 4 237 456, an astounding 43% bigger than the opening of his previous film, *Mr Bones."* [25] The film was released with 106 prints throughout the country, which was the second biggest print count for *any* film distributed locally by Ster-Kinekor. On the "Top 100 Most Popular Films Of All Time in SA" list, *Mr Bones* is second only to *Titanic*, which occupies first place. Three additional Schuster films feature on the list.[26]

Many filmmakers interviewed reluctantly named Leon Schuster as South Africa's most successful filmmaker, justifying their claim based on his commercial successes. Those filmmakers expressed a generally negative attitude to Schuster's films, but *Oh Shuks, I'm Gatvol* occupied the number one spot for local box office takings for two weeks in a row when it opened.[27] Schuster's films typically draw on a slapstick tradition, with frequent use of candid camera footage. Typically Schuster plays a filmmaker (*Panic Mechanic, Oh Shuks, I'm Gatvol*) in the process of making a movie, which provides the candid camera footage. The plot of the movie acts as a loose vehicle for the candid camera footage, and revolves

[23] Only "16 locally produced films have generated more than R6 million at the South African box office during the past twenty years." - Botha
[24] Moonyeenn Lee, quoted in Jackman. Ibid.
[25] "Gatvol Breaks Box Office Record" *SA Film*, April 2004. Available URL: http://www.safilm.org.za/news/article.php?uid=1077
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.

around the filmmaker's experience whilst producing the project. Schuster's audience has typically been white Afrikaans speaking South Africans, but other sectors of society have supported his films too. He has been able to poke fun at South African issues, such as racism, the transition and crime in a very frank manner. Schuster's films have topped local box office records, despite South Africa's box office takings traditionally being dominated by the US market.

Some attribute local films' otherwise general lack of success to the pervasive nature of American culture and film-making. By far most films shown in South African cinemas are from the US, and some filmmakers feel that local audiences are too used to those productions. Internationally the South African market is one of the most dominated by Hollywood products, and has one of the lowest ratios of local to foreign cinematic content in the world.

One of the central concerns of this research is with the aesthetic of local productions, and it should certainly be a consideration of the local film industry too. If the local market is completely dominated by Hollywood products, as many local filmmakers claim, the question is raised as to whether or not films that 'look and feel' South African can be successfully marketed locally. Most respondents agreed that films that look South African and don't necessarily imitate Hollywood products could be marketed successfully. However Richard Green, a prominent South African producer who has spent much time and effort promoting local films overseas has a different view. He believes that it is especially those local productions that 'look and feel South African' which have a stigma overseas of being financial failures. Many South African films have a reputation for being badly made. This is perhaps why a South African look has been associated with financial failure. Some interviewees cited Schuster's films as successful examples of films with a local aesthetic. However, Leon Schuster mentioned in a radio interview that much effort was taken to ensure that *Mr Bones* looked like US imports. He remarked that the visual effects they used "looked just like Hollywood." The film was full of costly special effects commonly associated

with higher budget American slapstick movies. The co-producer Anant Singh has also said,

> *"We are […] proud to have produced a local film of a standard that can effectively compete with the big-budget international films, not only on our turf, but hopefully on theirs as well."*[28]

At any rate a considerable amount of money was spent on *Mr Bones* to attain the high production value traditionally associated with Hollywood films, either to look like those products, or to appeal to local audiences who *expect* such a look. *Mr Bones* cost R 35 million[29] to produce, whilst the average local feature costs significantly less; between R 5 million and R 7 million.[30]

Local television ratings show that South African productions are extremely popular with local audiences. The ratings for January 2004 show that the most popular program was *Generations*, with an Audience Rating (AR) of 17.68.[31] Each ratings point equals around 145 590 viewers, meaning each episode of *Generations* was watched by about 2 574 031 people. *Generations* was closely followed by *Emzini Wezinsizwa*, which had an AR of 16.83. *The Bold and the Beautiful*, an American soap opera, was in third place. The majority of high scoring shows are local. By contrast, a "high profile" cricket match between South Africa and the West Indies had an AR of 7.27,[32] or 1 058 439 viewers.

What is most important, however, is the quality of the production. Many people believe that the common perception is that South African films are badly made and that this is the cause of their generally poor performance. Findings show that people are receptive to local content, provided that it measures up to overseas productions in terms of general production value. That is, the image, acting, visual aesthetic, and sound quality have to be comparable with the imports. For

[28] Videovision Press Release. *Videovision Entertainment*. No Date Given. Available URL: http://www.videovision.co.za/Press/press9.html
[29] Ibid. Suttner.
[30] Helen Kuun interview.
[31] "Ratings January 2004", *Screen Africa*, April 2004. Available URL: http://www.screenafrica.com/apr2004/ratings.htm
[32] Ibid.

instance, one of the most common complaints about local productions is that they often have poor sound quality, and are not as well lit as overseas productions. It may be argued that South African audiences perceive a local aesthetic as being badly made even when, strictly speaking, the products do have good production values. It is possible that our audiences are too attuned to American styles and conventions, so that local icons, locations and styles appear inferior when placed next to what I term the 'familiar foreign.' That is, local experiments in style can be undermined by peoples' expectations from overseas products. But local television provides another example of a successful production, despite not conforming to an American aesthetic. *Yizo Yizo*, a local educational drama series about young black youth has enjoyed a very strong viewership, with an unconventional visual style for its genre. Co-director Teboho Mahlatsi said this was a deliberate attempt to appeal to the visually literate South African youth population.

The question of a specifically South African aesthetic is a contentious one, and one that is subject largely to personal opinion. Some filmmakers were unsure of what 'South African' looks like, and questioned whether or not there is such a definitive thing in a land with so much diversity. Some believe that a South African aesthetic is something which would come naturally out of the film-making process, merely through the use of local people and places. I believe that South African filmmakers should actively try and make films that do not look like high production value Hollywood films. As one respondent said, "Why Photostat the Mona Lisa?"[33] It is unlikely that audiences will appreciate a poor replica of a Hollywood film. Hollywood has perfected its own styles of film-making, and it is unlikely that South Africa will ever be able to compete on the same grounds, even if only for purely financial reasons. Hollywood studios can afford to spend hundreds of millions of dollars on the making and marketing a single film. Their huge successes cover the costs of the failures, and so they are able to maintain the high volume of films that they are making. The high volume of films no doubt makes I harder for local filmmakers to compete.

[33] Garth Holmes interview.

It is my opinion that South Africa would best serve its interests by actively pursuing a course of film-making that is specifically not similar to that of Hollywood. In time, a unique local film identity will develop naturally. In much the same way that people can identify certain themes, styles and traits individual to Australian films, people will begin to recognise and appreciate a distinctly South African film.

At the moment South Africans also appear to be more receptive to stories, themes and icons from the United States than from Africa. This is no doubt due in part to the pervasiveness of that country's culture. South African youth consume many American products, from R&B music and denim jeans to MTV and McDonalds. The language and culture of that country have infiltrated and been assimilated into that of South Africa, particularly through music and movies. Another reason for the US' dominance could be attributed to the dominance of US television programming in the local market. This could in part be attributed to the British Equity boycott, and a similar one from Australia, which limited South Africa to television programming predominantly from the US in apartheid years. It was only after the end of these boycotts that non-US programming became available.[34] By that time American products had established a strong local customer base.

American films are also popular perhaps, as some have suggested, simply because Hollywood produces good entertainment. Many local filmmakers seem obsessed with notions of the transition, reconciliation and the politics of South Africa, and not enough with entertainment for entertainment's sake. Political issues often take the foreground in films, instead of forming the backdrop to entertaining local stories. There is also no rule that states that entertainment and social relevance need be on opposite ends of the film-making spectrum. It does appear that local filmmakers think so, though. Perhaps it is simply because local filmmakers aren't skilled enough yet to make films that incorporate socio-political issues seamlessly with entertainment.

[34] "South African Broadcasting Association" *Fact Index*. No Date Given. Available URL: http://www.fact-index.com/s/so/south_african_broadcasting_corporation.html

There is little doubt that the future of the local industry must lie within its borders, and not in foreign productions. A uniquely 'South African style' of film-making is something that has to happen naturally, and is not something that can be dictated. As local film-making gains momentum and status, South African places, themes and stories will become mythologised. When this happens South Africans will begin to appreciate and notice unique local styles and creative voices.

Chapter Three The short film

The short film has a number of advantages that make it a favourable option for filmmakers to use. The conditions of production in particular seem to favour the short form in a number of ways, and it is for these reasons that the short film is used particularly as an educational tool.

Firstly the budget for a short film is smaller and more manageable than that of longer forms. Film-making is an expensive, industrial process involving a significant amount of investment, both in terms of money and time. It is difficult to get adequate funding for a program, or television product in South Africa. Local productions cost between ten and twenty times more to than imported programs,[35] so the barriers to production are very high. This is especially true for independent filmmakers. A very modest budget for an overseas feature film production is a lot of money in South African terms. *Othello – An African Tale*, by Eubulus Timothy, was made in 2002 on a budget of $ 1 million, an amount equivalent to R 7, 1 million at the time.[36]

Of the independent short filmmakers who were interviewed, budgets have ranged from R 600 (Stanimir Stoykov, *Leaps Ahead*, 2002) to in excess of R 90 000 (Matthew Brown, *Clowns, 1999*)[37]. Independent filmmakers often rely on alternate means of financing, such as credit cards, donations and fundraising initiatives. Luiz De Barros and Underdog Films partially financed a R 14 000 short film by hosting a drag artist performance. Because the film had a gay theme, they also auctioned off a date with the lead actor to members of the gay community.[38]

[35] "Television", SABC, No Date Given. Available URL: http://www.sabc.co.za/annual_report/televisio.htm
[36] Ibid. Jackman.
[37] This figure excludes post production, which Brown estimated at costing an additional R50 000.
[38] De Barros, L. "How Do I Finance My Film?" *Filmmaking.com.* No Date Given. Available URL (Accessed 30 October 2004): http://www.filmmaking.com/financing.html

The size of the budget is often largely influenced by the format used. *Othello* was shot on 35 mm film – the most expensive medium. *God Is African*, (Akim Omotoso, 2003) another South Africa feature film, was shot on digital with a starting budget of R 60 000.[39]

Shooting on digital formats dramatically reduces costs. Stoykov and Brown represent two sides of a strong divide amongst filmmakers with regards to format. Some see it as all-important, and are willing to spend the extra money on the best format. The choice of format does affect a film's marketability, in that most digital formats do not perform well when enlarged for big screen projection, but even this is frequently not the main reason for filmmakers using the more expensive format. Apart from the technical advantages and disadvantages of differing formats, there is also a definite status attributed to celluloid film. 35 mm film is placed at the pinnacle of film formats not only because of its quality, but also because it carries with it a high status. Given the choice, most filmmakers would shoot on 35mm if they could, but the costs of doing so can be very prohibitive. Matthew Brown is a firm believer in using celluloid, and says format is all-important, as it also affects the perceived importance of a shoot.

> *"The crew see a small camera and a small tape and the level (of production value) just drops. Enough lights aren't ordered, the sound isn't good … there's no reason for that."*[40]

There is a 'buzz' that the average filmmaker feels when shooting on real film that isn't felt with video. Many of the respondents couldn't justify or articulate their preference for film over digital media. This is despite the recent advances in the quality of digital formats. It seems film is often used, as one respondent stated, "because it's cool", and not necessarily for purely aesthetic reasons. The perception exists most probably because the large, big budget productions almost exclusively use 35mm film, and most filmmakers aspire to be 'big directors.' There is also a romantic association and history behind film. Indeed, the most

[39] Interview with Akim Omotoso, from *SA Film*, Available URL: http://www.safilm.org.za/interviews/interview.php?uid=658
[40] Interview with Matthew Brown.

common reason that has been given for choosing a career in film-making has been because aspirant filmmakers want the status attributed to a renowned director. Using the high profile film format seems to be a prerequisite for being considered a 'real' director. This suggests that many filmmakers are obsessed with the act and image of film-making, and not necessarily the actual production of quality projects. Unfortunately it seems that many filmmakers would rather not make a film than be forced to shoot it on a digital format. The fact that film is in many ways an impractical medium – especially for new filmmakers – doesn't seem to matter to many filmmakers.

Celluloid is certainly the chosen format at the pinnacle of film-making for professional work. For this reason many training initiatives choose to shoot on this medium, despite the costs. Alby James, a renowned writer, director and initiator of *Dramatic Encounters* program stated,

> *"If we are to create a film culture able to compete with the best standards of the world, we have to accept that film sets the standard. The new digital cameras will undoubtedly come into their own and should be given some attention as soon as possible but for now, film is where it's at."*[41]

The financial implications of using film are not just limited to the cost of the stock. Shooting on film requires specialised technical crew, the cameras are for the most part more expensive to rent, and the post-production costs are much higher. There is also the added risk of film not exposing properly, which increases dramatically if the correct personnel aren't used on the shoot. Video or digital formats are better suited to the amateur filmmaker because generally an independent filmmaker has a much lower ratio of useable to unusable footage. It is not a big expense to shoot a lot of footage on tape, whereas it is very costly to do so on film.

Film-making is a very labour-intensive activity. Staff and talent costs typically comprise approximately 40% of a production's total costs,[42] so the fewer

[41] James, A. (1999) "Alby James' Review of Dramatic Encounters." Unpublished. Pp. 16.
[42] "The South African Film And Television Industry Report." Pp. 64.

specialised people that are needed to produce a product, the lower the costs. Stanimir Stoykov predominantly uses small format video cameras like Hi8 and SVHS, which are easier and cheaper to operate than large format video or film cameras. This enables him to film without the logistical constraints of larger crews, or the associated big budgets.

Because the short film is cheaper it favours diversity and development. Gina Bonmariage from The National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF) says that the majority of applications received by them are for feature films and documentaries. Over a three year period, the NFVF paid "over R 30 million" in grants to 414 projects,[43] which equates to an average grant of R 72 463 per project. Admittedly not all of these were grants went towards productions, but on a per-project basis, the amount could easily fully fund a short film, even if shot on celluloid. Bonmariage admitted that the NFVF does not have any existing initiative that is specifically targeted at short film-making, but said that it "has been in discussion."[44] If the NFVF is committed to development and giving new talent a chance to get exposure, it would make sense to rather fund many small projects as opposed to feature films. Short films favour issues of diversity and development, because of their relatively low cost. That is, a greater number of film practitioners and their projects can be funded, as opposed to fewer long format productions. Though most of the projects funded by the NFVF are features and documentaries, the foundation recently awarded R 880 000 to various short film projects.[45]

The short form itself is also more manageable in terms of aesthetic and narrative, especially for young inexperienced filmmakers. Again, Bonmariage mentioned an example where, before the NFVF would provide funding to a filmmaker to make a feature he was asked to make a short film to prove he could actually direct. It was the same thought process that motivated Gavin Hood to make *The Storekeeper* (1998), a short which was used to obtain funding for his feature film *A Reasonable Man* (1999). Short films are most commonly made as 'calling

[43] "Film Industry Survey" Pp 21
[44] Interview with Gina Bonmariage and Dimitri Martinis, NFVF.
[45] "Production Grants: 2003/2004" *NFVF*. No Date Given. Available URL: http://www.nfvf.co.za

cards' – projects which show a filmmaker's skills to potential employers or investors. It is more feasible to make a high production-value short film for the same reasons. That is, it is easier to make a short film *well* with the constraints and inherent high cost of film production. It is probable that all successful, working filmmakers today started out by making short films. Teboho Mahlatsi has said,

> *"I made Portrait [of a Young Man Drowning] to prove that I'm ready to make my first feature movie. Backers won't risk millions of Rands on the evidence of a TV success. I must show I can write and direct for the movie camera too."*[46]

It would fit that South Africa is better suited to making short films at this stage of the industry's development. South Africa certainly doesn't lack badly made feature films.

With the short film and other relatively inexpensive projects, the filmmakers are not necessarily as reliant on the support of other financial or co-production structures, because they don't generally have a high enough profile to attract those interests. Advertisers using product placements are known to take creative control away from the filmmaker. The rights of films that are individually produced remain with the filmmakers, which is not the case with co-productions. Whilst any independent filmmaker will undoubtedly struggle for funding and support, the independence does however also allow for a greater degree of artistic freedom. That is, the independent short filmmaker is less subject to external conditions of production. Because independent short filmmakers don't necessarily rely on other producers or co-production situations, they can do what they want with their projects, and are not subject to the same constraints that 'mainstream' filmmakers often are.

Directors and producers are typically in conflict over budgets – producers have to work to keep costs within reason, and directors feel constrained by the producers'

[46] Gordon, D. "Shortlisted for success" *Sunday Times.* 22 August 1999. Available URL: http://www.suntimes.co.za/1999/08/22/arts/ane03.htm

limitations. Ntshavheni Wa Luruli mentioned many problems that he experienced on the production of his most recent film *The Wooden Camera* (2003), which was an English/French/South African co-production. He said that differing production methods – as well as differing ideologies – caused problems in the production. There were a number of interpersonal conflicts between the French and English stakeholders, related to different modes of production particular to each nation. For example Wa Luruli mentioned that the French and English had stylistic differences regarding the editing, which caused conflict. Even personality traits Wa Luruli felt were "particular to one country" caused difficulties with people from another country. This turned out to be an understatement. UK-based executive producer Ben Woolford said that in fact at one meeting he realised that Wa Luruli and French producer Olivier Delahaye were not even speaking to each other.[47]

The fact that the short film is cheaper and more manageable also lends itself to being used by marginalised groups of people, who would normally struggle to get mainstream funding for projects. The short film is more conducive to the telling of marginalised stories; those on the fringes of society. The Gay and Lesbian Film festival is a good example of a collection of such films. At a time when homosexuality was still a taboo topic, the Gay and Lesbian Film festival was screening films made by, and for the gay community. Many artists see themselves as existing outside of 'normal' society, and it is from this position that they are able to comment on and critique mainstream culture. In the same way, gay members of society frequently see themselves as existing on the fringes of hegemonic culture. People that battle to get films made due to ideological and financial limitations are also frequently outside of the dominant sphere of influence. It is often because of this 'otherness' that they are unlikely to get institutional support. For instance films that are made independently within the gay community are free to place gayness as normative, which is something some organisations or a potential funder may have a problem with.

[47] Interview with Ben Woolford.

The accessibility of the short form makes it a good tool for artistic, social and political dialogue. In this way collections of short films often become, in many respects, repositories for critical comment and dialogue. This is certainly the case with events such as the Gay and Lesbian film festival, where the films shown become a type of forum in which gay issues, notions of identity and community can be explored. Whether people actively choose to make works that challenge society, or they do so because they themselves are outside of that society, the short form is often their chosen medium. Similarly, the short film was used in South Africa as a critical tool against apartheid (c.f. Botha). Both new critical cinema and up-and-coming directors are bound to be found, and grounded, in short film-making.

One of the problems experienced in the South African film industry is a lack of co-ordination or co-operation between the different elements of the production chain. For instance, many filmmakers have mentioned that there is a lack of effective collaboration between pre-production elements, such as script development and the actual production process, as well as between stages within the actual production pipeline. It was a problem mentioned by Maureen Conway about the SABC short film initiative *Dramatic Encounters*. In that initiative there were a number of producers involved – in both professional as well as training capacities – which negatively affected the productions. She was quoted as saying,

> *"the process was too top heavy with executive producers, episode producers, trainee producers and series producers, so at times the directors had up to seven different people watching the rushes, which I believe was too overwhelming for them. Basically there were too many people calling the shots."*[48]

In the independent short film-making field films are frequently controlled for whatever reason by only one or two people, who oversee every stage of the production. This can either be through choice, or as a result of financial conditions and limitations. Theoretically this situation – where fewer people are

[48] From Worsdale, A. "Short films fall short", *ZA@play*, 9 September 1999. Available URL: http://www.chico.mweb.co.za/mg/art/film/9909/990909-shortfilms.html

involved – could help prevent the disjuncture experienced between the different stages of production because frequently there are fewer formalised steps involving additional people.

The accessibility and relative manageability of short film production lends itself in part to Sarris' notion of the *auteur*. That is, it is a form that is more conductive to the lone filmmaker who has, or demands to have, tight control over every stage of the production pipeline. In this way short filmmakers can be evaluated, loosely using Sarris' system of film evaluation, which looked at;

> *"…the director's technical competence, the presence of a distinct visual style, and an interior meaning which arose precisely from the tension between the director (auteur) and the conditions of production with which he or she worked"*[49]

Strictly speaking the *auteur* theory cannot be applied in its entirety to short film-making in this context. The short film 'industry' is effectively in its infancy, and Sarris' *auteur* theory is an evaluation tool that needs to look at films in hindsight, over the period of a certain director's career. A good example of an *auteur* would be David Cronenberg, who has produced unique 'non-Hollywood' films within that system for a number of years, all showing his distinct motifs, style and themes. But the short film is seen by many as a sort of stepping-stone to bigger projects – namely the feature film – so there are no long-term short filmmakers. Many local notable short film directors have only produced one or two films to date so distinct, individual styles are difficult to discern.

There has been some debate about the nature of the *auteur*. It is important to note here that for the purposes of this report I refer to the *auteur* as a director who has tight control of a film's production. Whilst Roland Barthes questioned the *auteur's* role as the *sole determiner* of a text's meaning in his article "The Death of the Author", this issue is not directly in question here.[50] Whilst I will draw

[49] Cook, P (1985) The cinema book London: British Film Institute
[50] To read further, see "S/Z: An Essay by Roland Barthes, Richard Miller." (1975) New York: Hill and Wang

from his argument to further my discussion of thematic trends in short film-making, it will not be in opposition to Sarris' theory. The research is not commenting on or questioning the role of the so called *auteur* as far as being the sole determiner of signification in films. The *auteur* theory is used here purely as a platform from which to evaluate filmmakers.

Sarris' theory was formulated within the large, established studio system of Hollywood. South Africa's industry is much smaller, and the conditions of production differ greatly between South Africa and America. What is important about the studio system for the *auteur* theory is that it provides a number of constraints within which filmmakers have to work. The *auteur* is one who can leave an individual mark on a work despite the limitations that come from working within the studio system. Whilst the *auteur* has to work against these constraints in order to create individual work, those constraints also provide the very opportunity for the filmmaker to stand out.

I believe that in the South African context filmmakers resemble the US independent *auteur* in terms of production, partially because of the lack of a studio system. Indeed, in this respect it could be argued that *all* local filmmakers are, in effect, independent filmmakers because of the lack of large studios. Despite the absence of a studio system many South African short films can in fact be looked at in terms of the theory. Generally the most notable short films have been produced under initiatives such as *The Short and Curlies, Dramatic Encounters* and *New Directions*. Indeed, it is probably only through these initiatives that films, for the most part, are able to get any coverage at all. These initiatives provide the requisite structural and financial support necessary for the high-production values, which in turn allow for wider viewership. It is a problem with local film-making that truly independent filmmakers lack the institutional support – possibly because they are independent, or have independent views – and so cannot access the funds necessary to get that wide distribution. And so it is such that it is predominantly only those short films that are attached to initiatives or institutions that can get significant recognition. But with the support ultimately

comes control, so it can be surmised that these initiatives in many respects actually provide a mock studio situation within which the directors work. Any films that come out of those initiatives exist as a result of, or in spite of the initiatives' conditions of production.[51] They therefore can, after a fashion, be considered in light of the *auteur* theory. A directors' personal vision can shine through in spite of these circumstances. Films from those initiatives can be compared with one another, since each initiative must have had its own set of standards, chosen themes and selection criteria. These criteria and standards provide a common base from which to evaluate the films.

South Africa lacks a studio system for filmmakers to create work in opposition to, which is necessary for Sarris' "tension." We can nevertheless rate local films in terms of how much they mimic or oppose Hollywood, considering the pervasiveness of those films in the local market. The "classical Hollywood film"[52] has been so dominant that many agree that it became paradigmatic. Though the classical Hollywood film is not as dominant as it once was, it still informs many film-making conventions, which one either conforms to or opposes. Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson set out a number of traits that define a 'Hollywood style' of film.[53] Firstly, Hollywood films typically have linear plots, and the narrative begins *in medias res.*[54] Events happen chronologically and the plots have a "discernable beginning middle and end."[55] All events are as a result of a cause and effect relationship, and most commonly the films end with a clear resolution and closure. The editing serves to enhance the linear plot. Editing also helps to maintain and support the film's spatial and temporal verisimilitude through the use of devices like the 180 degree rule and editing transitions. The

[51] Some filmmakers who were involved with *New Directions* stated – off the record – that they experienced a high degree of control whilst shooting, particularly with regards to production methods.
[52] Term originally conceived by David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson in "The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960"
[53] Goldberg, M. "Classical Hollywood Cinema", No Date Given. Available URL (accessed on 22 August 2004):
http://faculty.uwb.edu/mgoldberg/courses/definitions/classicalHollywoodcinema.html
[54] Latin: "In the midst of things"
[55] Ibid. Goldberg.

editing is contiguous and designed to appear seamless, without attracting any attention to itself.

Other elements in film production have also become 'standardised,' through both classic Hollywood and European film-making. For instance cinematography has become reasonably standardised through 'rules' of composition and accepted camera angles, camera movements and lighting techniques. A subject filmed from below appears superior, or bright colours denote happiness. Stark lighting on one side of a character's face reflects internal strife, or duality. Many of these conventions are informed by culture and the media in general too. Nonetheless, many of them are used by, and come to define, western narrative cinema.

The narrative distance in Hollywood films is most frequently an omniscient third-person point of view, which allows the narrative to jump between different storylines. Other narrative conventions have arisen through devices such as the genre film and the use of character stereotypes. In general, characters typically act with psychological, as opposed to social motivations.[56]

It is largely because of Hollywood's dominance that these – and other – conventions and styles have become 'natural' or normative. The short filmmaker is more likely to be seen as an *auteur*, because it is more possible for a smaller project to be primarily driven by a director's personal vision, which is essential for a film to have a unique quality. It also seems apparent that the short form is more accessible and accommodating to the idea of an *auteur*, since it is more manageable than the long form. The short film director is able to control every aspect of his or her film, and ensure that a personal mark is made. Frequently, as in the British notion of authorship,[57] short films are also positioned in opposition to Hollywood. The filmmakers make a deliberate effort to oppose Hollywood conventions and styles in the pursuit of individuality. A number of local short films have broken away from dominant forms of expression and attempted a unique local style, such as *Portrait of a Young Man Drowning* (Teboho Mahlatsi,

[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid, Pp. 147

1999), or *The Storekeeper*. The short filmmaker is more able to make entirely his or her own film, and is less affected by external factors, or control.

It may be argued that those very constraints which force filmmakers to use the short form actually give rise to a critical, independent film-making community. That is, potential filmmakers are forced to use non-mainstream methods of film production, partially because the 'barriers to entry' into the film industry are so high. Secondly, because many of these filmmakers are often unconventional – one of the reasons for their marginalised status – the films they create are frequently atypical, critical and independent. The independent short film arena is perhaps the only place where new, dynamic directors with different styles and visions are able to work and experiment with relative freedom. That is, experimentation is more possible, and more viable through the short film. For this reason we can look to short films to find recent advances and new trends in local film-making. For instance, new black South African directors such as Teboho Mahlatsi – and more recently Norman Maake – have gained early recognition through their short films.[58]

For the most part independently produced short films are generally unremarkable. This is probably due to the fact that they are made predominantly by inexperienced filmmakers, who are making works for their show reels, and lack financial resources and professional support. For the same reasons there are very few independently produced short films from South Africa. Those that are produced rarely get significant exposure, and so are not particularly viable financial ventures.

Certainly a filmmaker that creates a unique film will be seen as more of an *auteur* than one who effectively mimics Hollywood aesthetic and narrative styles. Few will typically stand out from the group as having a unique style and vision. It is not enough to merely have the right elements in a production to get a good result. A good script, good actors, and a good director do not necessarily a good movie

[58] Admittedly these filmmakers have emerged through fairy standard routes; both studied through film schools, and Mahlatsi's first 'big break' was through a film-making initiative.

make. Film-making is more than just a quality control process, and a film is more than just a sum of its parts. As such, there is a range in the quality of films made under the same initiatives, despite all having the same resources. Rating films objectively as 'good' or 'bad' is difficult, and so it is essential to return to a set of criteria, such as those contained in Sarris' *auteur* theory. It would be problematic to effectively rate films from different initiatives on the same criteria because the conditions of production are undoubtedly different. Budgets and resources vary for one, and the initiatives have different levels of intervention and control. A filmmaker can be rated relative to his or her contemporaries, or other filmmakers working in similar conditions. Given the same resources the so-called *auteur* director is one who is able to save a film from being clichéd or trite, in spite of the constraints. The *auteur* leaves an individual mark on a project, resulting in a film that is not merely a sum of its parts, nor just effective use of the technical aspects of production.

A director's technical competence is usually the first, most visible indicator of whether a film is successful or not. That is, whether or not all the production elements – camera, lighting, sound, editing – have been used well. The presence of a distinct visual style is also most important, in order to distinguish a work as being original.

The visual appearance of a film is usually the first thing to betray a film's particular conditions of production. Unfortunately frequently the visual look of a film can be attributed to the size of the budget. For instance, on a per minute basis, the *New Directions* films cost around R 23 330 for each minute of completed film. *The Short and Curlies* films were almost twice as expensive, costing R 45 454 per minute. As a result films from that initiative have by far the highest visual quality when compared with films from *New Directions* or *Dramatic Encounters*. Alby James said that the low quality of the *Dramatic Encounters* films was attributable to the fact that the SABC had "not moved on to appreciate the differences in quality and marketability if one increases the cost-

per-minute above the norm."[59] The importance of money cannot be underestimated – especially in the film industry.

As mentioned earlier, the choice of format is often the largest determiner of a production's cost. Short films frequently lack high production value, because their accessibility means that they are favoured by filmmakers who don't have large budgets or experience. They often suffer from a lack of professional production techniques because they have difficulty attracting the best, or indeed any professionals to work on them, especially if they are unlikely to get any significant exposure.

Cheaper formats do not usually carry with them the same high level of visual quality, and so more often than not have an immediate and negative effect on a film's reception. Some non-film formats are of a very high quality, such as DigiBeta or High Definition digital, but these formats costs are not greatly dissimilar to that of film. I believe that cheaper formats can still be used to great effect, provided that the film is made well. That is, that proper attention is paid to the camera work, lighting, sound and all other elements of the production. There are a number of recent examples of films that have successfully used digital recording media for a specific effect. A particularly notable example is *City of God* (2002) by Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund. The film was an Academy Award Nominee in the Cinematography, Writing, Directing and Editing categories in 2004. The aim of using a digital format was to have a distinct visual style that matched the fast paced editing and the use of documentary codes and conventions. In this case the use of digital was perfectly suited to meet those requirements, whilst also keeping costs down. Renowned directors have also followed or experimented with the digital route. Spike Lee (*Bamboozled*, 2000), Steven Soderbergh (*Full Frontal*, 2002) and George Lucas (*Star Wars: Episode II Attack of the Clones*, 2002) are a few. But the high quality Digital media used in Star Wars does not necessarily differ from film in terms of cost *or* quality. Most recently Michael Mann has made *Collateral* (2004) on a "specially modified high-

[59] James. Pp. 16

definition digital-video camera", used specifically to attain a digital look. The cheaper digital formats, with their 'compromised' visual quality, can be used to good effect to enhance a film's visual style.

It is important here to make a distinction between 'style' and notions of a film's 'look and feel.' Style refers to a set of elements which, when taken together will define a work as belonging to that specific style. For instance, the classic Hollywood style mentioned earlier utilises narrative conventions of form, genre and character. A specific style will also have its own set of discursive elements; those components which affect how the narrative is conveyed, such as camera techniques, music and editing. Discursive elements are frequently paired with specific generic narrative elements. *Film noir* is such an example. Format is a discursive element, but it has become intricately linked with narrative elements. What I propose is that whilst a film does need to have effective use of both narrative and discursive elements, a film's style is not entirely dependent on the medium. A film's 'look and feel' is less tangible, but is definitely more dependant on the visual elements of a production, such as the format.

A cheaper format will undoubtedly affect a film's reception. Whether or not this reception is negative depends largely on the modes of production. If the production is not well executed in the first place, the cheaper format will ultimately have a negative result. A director can choose to ignore using some high-end elements, such as film as a medium, but it must appear to be a deliberate choice. Likewise, when established practices and production techniques are subverted, it must be informed and controlled, which is why technical competence is so important. Teboho Mahlatsi is reputed to have specifically wanted to not use film in *Portrait of a Young Man Drowning*, but the conditions of the initiative did not allow for this. He did however de-saturate the footage to give it the characteristic gritty look and feel. Unfortunately though, less accomplished directors who attempt experimentation through subverting 'established' techniques run the risk of appearing incompetent. On the one hand, technical aptitude is essential for widespread acclaim and recognition. A work that is too

experimental can look like bad film production, especially in the hands of an inexperienced or untalented filmmaker. For instance, a badly made student film frequently either plagiarises other filmmakers, or descents into obscurity through the use of ambiguous, untried film-making methods. A film that breaks 'rules' of narrative sequences can in some cases be harder for audiences to understand. A sudden break or jump in narrative time can be signalled through a number of codified visual elements. As an example, flashbacks can be explained through a change in appearance or sound. In this case, black and white footage is often used, with a shift in narrative perspective from third to first person. The narrative shift is often preceded by a zoom into the character's face. If some convention is not used, the shift will be confusing to the viewer. Conventions such as these are difficult to subvert effectively. As a calling card, a short film will more often than not need to show competence in standard production methods if the filmmaker wants recognition in mainstream film-making.

The accessibility of the short form also favours lone filmmakers. Whilst the *auteur* would typically use the system to his or her own advantage, a lone filmmaker is one who often carries out multiple tasks on the project, including writing, directing, editing and even camerawork and other technical activities. There are many negative aspects to films made primarily by one person. Film production is a very technical activity, with many specialised tasks. A director that is divided amongst technical as well as directorial tasks is not able to dedicate himself completely to the task of directing. Independent short filmmakers are often known for deliberately subverting the status quo in multiple stages of the production chain, such as employing unconventional camera techniques or composition. The films often lack well-developed scripts, which sometimes manifests itself in improvised mock-documentary-style parodies, reminiscent of the Dogme 95 film-making manifesto.[60] Haphazard editing, obscure references and Brechtian, self-reflexive acting styles are also other favourites of the inexperienced maverick filmmaker. In many cases the rough visual 'style' occurs by default, and not by choice. The lack of resources, and in particular experience,

[60] See "Dogme 95: The Vow of Chastity (abridged)" at http://cinetext.philo.at/reports/dogme_ct.html

results in films with very low production value. Instead of planning sequences and shots to ensure there is enough footage for visual coherence, the filmmakers subvert the very practices and codes of film-making that have been established through years of film development. In order to be avant-garde, they undermine the very mechanisms of film production, so the medium is not used to its full potential. The end result is compromised. A common excuse is that the set-up and planning stages are seen as extraneous to the act of film-making, that it should be about the performance – 'the moment.' Evidently capturing the action – actually filming the event well – is not as important. 'Avant-garde' becomes an excuse for low production value, rather than an informed, deliberate choice. This naïveté all too often fails. Very seldom is it rewarded and attributed to brilliance.

As evidenced in countless student short films, 'technical competence' and attempting a 'distinct visual style' are often in conflict. By trying unusual tactics, the new filmmaker without a reputation to rely on always runs the risk of having his or her interventions misread as incompetence. The new filmmaker always walks a thin line between experimentation and convention. If a work is too conventional, then it can run the risk of being trite. What is probably lacking in such situations is experience and a sound knowledge of the visual medium. One needs to know the 'rules' before breaking them, and the value of experience cannot be understated.

It is also a problem with local film-making that people are reluctant to work on another project in a diminished capacity. This was expressed by the NFVF, which gets an excess of applications from lone filmmakers, the majority of whom only want to direct. Also, a lot of inexperienced filmmakers don't want to allow others to work on 'their' project. Works-in-progress are closely guarded, and as a result collaboration is limited. The maverick type filmmaker is often the type to demand complete control of a project, to the detriment of the production. A director who is too close to a project can lack a degree of objectivity. The end result is a film which doesn't have sufficient scope or depth, due to a lack of consultation, or range of opinion in the production.

A trend that became apparent through the research process was the fact that, in contrast to inexperienced filmmakers, virtually none of the established directors have a set group of people who they work with all the time. This evidence implies that individuals are selected to work on a project-by-project basis, and not due to connections or other associations. All the professional interviewees said they employ the best people they can for a project based purely on their experience and suitability for the specific project. They also follow set modes of production when shooting, which shows a strong sense of professionalism. These filmmakers are all currently working in the film industry, or in educational institutions. Typically, amateur or inexperienced directors have a group of people they work with all the time, irrespective of the project, and don't generally follow the same standard production techniques.

Distribution and the Short Film

As well suited to promoting development and education as the short film may be, there are also drawbacks that are particular to the short film. The biggest problem respondents saw the short form as having, from a business point of view at least, is with distribution. Short films have traditionally been very difficult, near impossible to distribute because they are difficult to package and market by themselves. Without the probability of distribution, investor money is very hard to come by. Audiences are unlikely to go to a cinema to watch a single short film, and groups of short films are also difficult to market. Ster-Kinekor has however expressed an interest in the past to show short films in its cinemas. The company says one of its key concerns is the development of the local film industry, and has acknowledged that screening local short films would be a good development initiative. Helen Kuun, who is the marketing manager of Independent Films at Ster-Kinekor Pictures, says that the distributor is more than willing to show local short films before its features, provided the films meet a few conditions. Due to

advertising and cinema scheduling, a short film cannot be too long if it is to be shown before a feature. This will impact on the advertising revenue for Ster-Kinekor, and patrons would not want to sit in the cinema for an additional half an hour to watch a short film, particularly one that they didn't go to see in the first place.

There are other cost implications, such as the cost of prints. The cost of printing 35mm copies of digital and celluloid films for projection is very high. Ster-Kinekor would not be able to justify the cost of printing short films, without passing the cost onto the consumer. Kuun said the audience would not want to pay extra to see a local short film when they have paid for a Hollywood film. The short films would also have to compliment the feature film, in terms of genre, narrative and aesthetic. Kuun also mentioned that screening a sub-standard local short – or a good short that only looks bad when placed next to a big-budget US film – would probably have a negative impact on the local perception of South African films.

The option of digital projection has been explored, with some festivals being hosted by digital projection network Cinemark. The company has 57 digital projectors in Ster-Kinekor and Nu-Metro cinemas.[61] Only four of the projectors are High Definition units,[62] which are necessary to meet Ster-Kinekor's quality standards for films, so currently a large-scale digital film projection network is not possible.

One of the biggest problems facing the local film industry in general is a lack of audience development. South Africa also has a small local audience. Without an audience, a film will not be financially successful, and financial flops are not good investments. It becomes an endless cycle; until people start watching local films at the cinema, there won't be any significant returns to support the industry. A number of people have stated that one of the problems facing the local industry is low audience visual literacy, especially amongst formerly disadvantaged groups.

[61] Cinemark Rate Card
[62] Helen Kuun interview

This is unlikely. The visual medium is a favourable medium for education precisely because it is easy to understand, and is not dependant on literacy. South Africa has one of the highest numbers of television sets per capita in Africa, second only to Egypt.[63] There is little doubt then that the general population has good levels of visual literacy.

The lack of a black audience signifies a huge untapped customer base. Most of South Africa's cinemas are in shopping malls, which are in turn in the residential areas and out of easy reach of those living in informal settlements, townships or rural areas. It is one of the legacies of the apartheid system that means there is a huge lack of cinematic infrastructure in 'black' areas. Therefore, the cost of watching a cinema movie for people who live in these areas is undoubtedly higher, due to additional transport costs. However recently Ster-Kinekor has built two more cinemas in townships – in addition to those already at Mabopane, Daveyton and Dobsonville – bringing the total township cinemas to five.[64] The total number of South African cinema screens at that time of the survey was around 639.[65] This means that, excluding independent township cinemas, for which there were no figures available, the number of township screens amounts to less than eight percent of the total. The township cinemas are part of an effort to increase black cinema audiences, and they were built for Ster-Kinekor subsidiary Ster-Moribo. The venture has not been very successful at all, with low occupancy rates of between 8 and 11%, despite the cinemas being of "world class quality." They were based on Ster-Kinekor's shopping centre cinema format, but they did not attract enough customers. Cinemas in central Johannesburg and Southgate Mall, which is near Soweto, have been doing very well, with occupancy rates of between 16 and 22%.[66] Figures suggest that the black movie-goers are by and large not in fact township residents.[67] It appears that the township cinemas haven't been successful in part because they lacked the attraction of other shops

[63] "Population & Development – Television Sets (per 1,000 people)." Available URL: http://www.alsagerschool.co.uk/subjects/sub_content/geography/Gpop/HTMLENH/stats/tvs.htm
[64] Interestingly, in 1998 Ster-Kinekor was in the process of constructing 350 screens in 30 multi-screen complexes in Europe - "The South African Film And Television Industry Report."
[65] "The South African Film And Television Industry Report." Pp. 52.
[66] Ibid Pp. 67.
[67] Ibid. Pp. 68.

and activities found in urban and peri-urban shopping malls. Cinema going is a 'lifestyle activity' – and involves other activities such as shopping and eating at restaurants. Cinema going is generally associated with more well-off members of society. Most frequent cinemagoers are between the ages of 16 and 24, and fall into the LSM 7-10 group. Township inhabitants are typically from the LSM 5-6 group, which generally cannot afford the ticket price.[68]

The NFVF and the Film Resource Unit (FRU) are actively involved with the marketing and distribution of local films. The FRU was actively involved with the Ster-Moribo venture. Whilst cinematic distribution in townships does not seem to work, DVD rental is extremely successful, according to Helen Kuun of Ster-Kinekor. This suggests that possibly a move toward the Nigerian system where films are made and distributed on video, and sold on the streets may work.

Another problem is that the local market does not appear to be big enough to support local industry.[69] David Wicht, managing director of Film Afrika says, "Unlike Australia, we don't have sufficient local audiences to sustain an indigenous industry; we have to look to the international market to recoup our costs and make a profit."[70] Kuun said that *Promised Land* (Jason Xenopolous, 2003) was considered to have a "good run" on the local arts circuit, and grossed around R 300 000. However this amount was nowhere near to making a profit for the producers.

Cinema also has a lot of competition for viewers from television. Local television has a much wider choice of product, and going to a cinema to see a film involves making an active decision to leave home. Television is far more accessible, and is therefore much more competitive in terms of getting viewers to watch certain programs. Local television shows are successful because they are relevant to their viewers. It is felt that people who can barely afford cinema ticket prices generally want to be entertained when they do actually go to a movie. The weight of the

[68] Helen Kuun interview
[69] "The South African Film And Television Industry Report." Pp. 68.
[70] Quoted in Beukes, L.

evidence suggests that recent local film-making has dealt too much with socio-political issues and hasn't concentrated enough on entertainment. Leon Schuster has never been accused of focussing too much on socio-political issues, but he has certainly learnt about his audience and its likes. This is surely the key to his success. He has cornered his market, found a formula that works and stuck with it. He said,

> *"Whatever the crits and the high-faluted [sic] larny okes might say about my comedy, I have to please the man on the street. I don't cater for anybody else other than the average oke on the street."*[71]

Likewise, in order to get black audiences into cinemas, one has to cater specifically for them. Dingi Nthuli of Hybrid Productions doesn't think that the problem lies with distribution, either.

> *"Millions of black people are choosing not to go to the movies: 52% of the population of 40 million is between the ages of 18 and 25, yet last year, there were only 4 million admissions from black audiences. The biggest piece of misinformation is that these people don't have the money; getting people into cinemas is about targeting them and showing films that speak to them."*[72]

Unfortunately South African film distribution favours the distribution of Hollywood films. In South Africa local distributors don't carry any risk when they release a Hollywood film. The costs of distributing and marketing a studio film from the US are covered by the studio. Additionally, if a studio film runs at a loss, that loss is paid back to the distributor. Distributors earn an average of around 25% of a film's gross.[73] This is clearly one of the main reasons why Hollywood films are so dominant in South Africa. Until recently, the only local filmmaker to feature in local cinemas has been Leon Schuster, who has become an established success. Local films are treated as independent releases so the risks, as well as the costs of the prints are covered by the local distributors and

[71] Schuster, L. Quoted in van der Linden, N. "Leon Schuster: SA's Candid King." Available URL: http://writersclub.iafrica.com/nils_vd_linden/features/221741.htm
[72] "South African film survey", *Hollywood Reporter*
[73] "The South African Film And Television Industry Report." Pp. 83.

exhibitors. The cost of marketing a local film is also taken by the local distributor. Merely showing local films is not enough. Without investing in the marketing of the film the audience will not provide the returns to justify supporting films other than those of Leon Schuster. The risk for the distributor is greater, but so is the potential profit. Apart from the low-risk advantages of Hollywood films, they also present higher returns for the distributors. The audience and the potential for local films to do well does appear to exist, but it needs to be developed much further.

The short film seems to be perfectly suited to raising the status of local film-making. They are easier to create and display than longer forms. Short films are also more viable for alternate means of distribution, such as the Internet, or on airlines. For instance, Virgin Atlantic is looking for short films to screen on its flights.[74] The short film can be easily made and viewed, without the risks and complications of longer format production and distribution. There does seem to be a growing short film-making culture, with short films being shown in cafés, nightclubs, galleries, bars and most recently cell phones. Recent developments in cellular technology mean that handsets are able to store, send and receive video clips, which has opened up a new market for ultra-short films.

Unfortunately in order for short films to be sold for distribution as packages, they would typically have to be produced under a common theme. This would usually involve large pricey initiatives. The *Mama Africa* Series, produced by Zimmedia, was such a group of short films produced under a single theme to make them more marketable. The aim was to market the films made by African women as a single package, either for cinematic release in two 90 minute programs, or as a series of 26 minute shorts for television broadcast. Unfortunately the cinematic release by Ster-Kinekor did not do well at the box office, so this approach is not necessarily a recipe for success.

[74] Whitecross, M. "Shorts" Available URL: http://www.londonstudent.org.uk/13issue/film/shorts.htm

Short films have little or no value as sources of other revenue. Today film distribution is tied very closely to the sale and ownership of the rights to produce and sell merchandise. Films often lead to the sale of millions of dollars in toys and branded objects, as is the case with films like *Harry Potter* or *Spiderman*. The short film simply lacks the large audiences and resultant economy-of-scale that large Hollywood films are able to exploit commercially. For the same reasons short films don't often benefit from income from product placements from advertisers.

Generally the short film is also hard to sell to television stations. However this does seem to be changing to a certain extent. Tamsyn MacCarthy has sold two short films to overseas television networks for around US $ 1 000 each, which is a very insignificant amount considering the costs of producing high quality short films. Some networks are finding that short films work well to "fill gaps" in broadcasts. Matthew Brown has also sold *Clowns* to two overseas networks in addition to M-Net. Both of the overseas sales were worth US $ 1 200 each.
M-Net paid the very low price of R 25 000 and was able to screen the movie sixty times in South Africa and an additional sixty times in the rest of Africa. Despite having sold *Clowns* three times, Brown has not made any money off the film yet. Whilst a 26-minute short film could conceivably be split up to accommodate advertising slots, the film would not have the benefit of an established viewership, as is the case with soap operas like *Isidingo*. The more established viewers a program has, the higher the rates for the advertising time that can be charged. Without that continuity, short films cannot command high prices from television networks, as there wouldn't be a guaranteed return of investment.

This is a major problem with short films, in that they do not earn a lot of money. It is a clear link to their worth in distribution and marketing. The lack of distribution means that shorts are not seen by a significant number of people, and in turn cannot command higher prices. They are seen primarily as student productions or festival entry pieces, and not much more. Distribution is a fundamental problem. A film has little value – even as a work of art – if it is not

viewed by people. The whole point of film-making is to have films seen by audiences, and people are disinclined to work on projects that aren't likely to be viewed by many people. Traditionally short films are non-commercial, and it is doubtful that this is set to change drastically.

Short film-making is seen as limiting in terms education and development, as evidenced in the *New Directions* initiative, which changed its focus to feature film production. The short film doesn't afford the same script and story development possibilities that longer films do, and narrative arcs cannot be developed in as much detail or complexity. Characters, too, cannot be as fully rounded as in feature films, because this takes screen time which the short film cannot afford. As a result many short films frequently resort to using stereotypes. This is either out of the necessity to have instantly identifiable characters or because of a certain degree of directorial and authorial naiveté.

Because of the difficulty of creating a narrative arc that is character driven in such a short space of time, many short films are about external events that happen to these characters, as opposed to being grounded in a specific character's development or own initiative. For instance the protagonist in Zola Maseko's *The Foreigner* (1994) has to deal with the tragic effects of xenophobia and aggression that befall him, and Charlie from *The Pink Leather Chair* (Russel Thompson, 1997) is kidnapped and awaits his fate at the hands of his captors. Short films often fall into the trap of being chiefly concerned with issues, as opposed to story or entertainment. Those films become small parables, educating the viewer about a moral truth – 'xenophobia is bad' or 'violence begets violence.' Indeed the short film's length does not afford much more narrative scope. The feature film allows the filmmaker more opportunity to work with a more comprehensive art of storytelling. Short films are often undervalued as works of film-making, and are seen as a poor cousin of the feature film. This is especially true in an industry that sees the feature film as the pinnacle of film-making. This is illustrated in the fact that only very few filmmakers interviewed wanted to continue making short films. None of the professional directors saw themselves making many, if any more

short films. But many vibrant, dynamic short films are made nonetheless. Jeremy Nathan, executive producer of the *Short and Curlies* films, said that short films are "stepping stones to making longer, more important feature films."[75] Many local directors started their film-making careers making short films. There are many examples, such as Akim Omotoso, director of *God Is African,* who was part of the SABC's *Dramatic Encounters* Initiative, making the short *The Caretaker* in 1999. The short film was nominated for Best Picture at the 2000 Avanti Awards.

[75] Stephen, J. "Husk bears fruit in Cannes", *ZA@Play*, 20 May 1999. Available URL: http://www.chico.mweb.co.za/mg/art/film/9905/990520-husk.html

Chapter Four Short film-making at present

The last ten years have seen many changes in the industry. Since the first democratic elections, a number of new filmmakers have emerged. Previous voices that were silenced have started to be heard. A new black middle class with spending power has emerged. New advertising campaigns and television programs that cater for and target this market have begun, and all sectors of the arts slowly have started to become more representative. Despite this process 1995 figures showed that only 10% of industry professionals were black.[76] The film industry is still predominantly white male dominated. There has however been a degree of transformation in the industry, and a number of new notable black filmmakers have emerged, as discussed later.

Other sectors of society have also enjoyed increased freedom. In 1994 the Gay and Lesbian Film Festival began. Short films have featured prominently in the festival, all dealing with some aspect of gay life. This festival is seen by many as one of the first heralds of a new film-making age in South Africa, because it has given voice to a marginalised sector of society. Previously such films did enjoy some exposure through other festivals – the Weekly Mail Film Festival of the eighties for one – but there wasn't a dedicated platform for them, and the festival was plagued by bannings during the state of emergency of the 1980s. In much the same way, there wasn't really an established institution or initiative dedicated specifically to short film-making.

As mentioned in the general discussion of the short film, the form favours diversity because a higher number of projects and viewpoints can be accommodated. "Discourses are visible textual manifestations of ideology,"[77] and therefore reflect those ideologies of the filmmakers. Traditionally mainstream media has represented the ideologies of hegemonic culture, which were of "the

[76] "The South African Film And Television Industry Report." Pp. 63. It also stated that 35% of industry professionals were female.
[77] "Discourse Analysis" *k.i.s.s of the panopticon*. 9 March 2001. Available URL: http://www.sla.purdue.edu/academic/engl/theory/index.html

powerful against the powerless and the repressed."[78] For instance, the "subsidy B" scheme films – despite being 'made for' the black population – reflect the Nationalist government's paternalistic attitude towards its black citizens. In the same way, some male-dominated cultures' sexist attitudes are shown through the portrayal of women in films. Because the short film is often the province of marginalised sectors of society, it can be a way of 'speaking back' against the establishment and injustice. According to Botha (2002),[79] short films in particular have, since the 1980's, generally focussed on marginalised sectors of society. Botha states that short film-making in the eighties was mostly limited to "images against apartheid."[80] Many of these films were documentaries, aimed at exposing untold stories and realities that were repressed under apartheid. It was only in the late eighties says Botha, that different themes began to be explored in short film-making, albeit tentatively. These short films signified the birth of a "new, critical South African cinema."[81] It was a number of years later in the nineties when the censorship laws were relaxed, and freedom of expression was possible.

A surprising diversity of subject matter has surfaced in short film-making in the last ten years. The thematic trends are important to observe because they allude to the ideologies and issues of marginalised groups of people; the formerly disadvantaged and the independent filmmaker alike. Not all the films have been limited to issues directly related to apartheid.

There have been a number of recent thematic trends in local film-making. Many of the films incorporate more than just one theme, but the films can be grouped together according to their dominant subject matters. One of the most pervasive trends, predictably, has been the emergence of films made for, and in many cases, by those formerly disadvantaged groups. Films such as *The Children and I* (Ken Kaplan, 1993), *The Foreigner* and *Chikin Biz'nis* (Khalo Matabane, 1997) are a

[78] Ibid.
[79] Botha, M. "Homosexuality and South African Cinema" *KINEMA*. 2002. Available URL: http://www.kinema.uwaterloo.ca/botha021.htm
[80] Botha, M. P.(=?=)"South African short-film making from 1980 to 1995: a thematic exploration." Available URL: http://www.unisa.ac.za/default.asp?Cmd=ViewContent&/contentID=7133 Accessed on 18/4/2003
[81] Ibid.

few of the shorts that exclusively examine black experience. *The Return* (Jeremy Handler, 1996) and Junaid Ahmed's *The Vow* (1999) showed life from an Indian South African perspective. Another marginalised community has been explored through films set in the Cape Flats, namely Russell Thompson's *The Pink Leather Chair* and Barry Berk's *Angel* (1996).

Tradition in these communities has also been a prevalent theme in short film-making. *Christmas with Granny* deals with issues of tradition, western culture and its effects on black South Africans. The film follows the story of a young boy, who is sent to be baptised into his grandmother's faith. The film is set on the train journey, and the battle between tradition and modernity is played out metaphorically on the train ride. The characters in the compartment represent different sides of the debate.

Many of the films across the board examine the legacy of apartheid, and the notion of the "New South Africa." New film practitioners started to deal with stories concerning the transition of South Africa from the 'old' to 'new'. (cf. Botha 1995). The transition has featured strongly in a number of films, such as *An Old Wife's Tale* (Dumisane Phakathi, 1998) and *Chikin Biz'nis*. *An Old Wife's Tale* is set on a farm in the early days of the new South Africa. It follows the story of white Afrikaner Hendrik who decides that his farm worker Lukas is more equal than him because he can have more than one wife. In his pursuit of 'equality', Hendrik decides to exercise his right to have more than one wife. This pursuit understandably causes strife in his conservative community. More than a humorous look at polygamy, Marion Whitehead's script represents a coming together of black and white South Africans; a dialogue about the similarities and differences between the country's inhabitants. The transition has recently received serious treatment in Ian Gabriel's feature *Forgiveness* (2004).

No doubt linked to ideas of the transition, issues about white paranoia surfaced in amongst others, the films *Markowitz* (Sechaba Morajele, 1999) and *Heads or Tails*. (Munier Parker, 1999) The figure of the post-apartheid disenfranchised

white South African also appeared in the taut *Husk* and darkly comical *Lucky Day*. This new role experienced by white South Africans is examined a number of times, particularly by Afrikaans filmmakers from The South African School of Motion Picture Medium and Live Performance. (AFDA)

Predictably violence has been a major theme in South African film-making. A large number of short films have had violence or criminal acts at the centre of their storylines.[82] The country's apparent violent nature has been seen in *The Storekeeper*, *Clowns*, *Stray Bullet* (Patrick Shai, 1994), *Husk* (Jeremy Handler, 1999), *Salvation* (Minky Schlesinger, 1997), *Heads or Tails* and *Portrait of a Young Man Drowning*, to name a few.

Films, and especially the short film, became an accessible means of exposing previously unseen or unheard sectors of society. However, it seems that these films have by and large focussed more on the political issues. Other issues, in particular those concerning women, have not featured as strongly. The struggle worked for the liberation of a people as a whole, and as such issues of women's equality took a back seat. Indeed, there are not many female filmmakers. For this and other reasons very few films have been made by, or exclusively concerned, women.

Obviously the political backdrop and legacy of South Africa will no doubt continue to affect film-making for many years to come, but the short films that have emerged represent a diversification and expansion of the themes being explored by local filmmakers, both independently and through initiatives.

Notably, many of the films were made by black, Indian or coloured filmmakers. This is most important because, according to Laura Mulvey, the viewer is forced to identify with the look of the film; the camera, the audience's view and that of

[82] In particular, for a number of years student films have traditionally been centred on violence. More often than not this has probably been due to the popularity of the many ultra violent films of the time, such as Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) and *Pulp Fiction* (1994). These films for the most part don't represent works that deal with a specifically South African perspective on the issue of violence in society.

the characters within the film.[83] This is significant because the viewer is literally forced to adopt a different point of view, and experiences the world portrayed by the filmmaker. One of the most obvious developments in film has been the proliferation of films that focus on the realities of these formerly disadvantaged population groups.

Barthes wrote that there can be no single, set meaning for a photograph (or text), because the meanings are made up of a set of culturally specific signs. Denotation and connotation are the first two orders of signification. Connotation, the second order, is a culturally specific form of signification that is based upon "common cultural codes/conventions." Films, like any text or photograph, are also created within a specific context with its own set of signifiers. The film is directly linked to reality because it is created within this context. Barthes hailed the "death of the author," (or *auteur*) because the *auteur* could not in fact be the sole determiner of the meaning of a text, precisely because meaning is context-specific.

Barthes' definition of myth – the third order of signification – is that it is a "story by which a culture explains some aspect of reality or nature." Myth is an "overarching cultural system of meaning within which […] denotation and connotation takes place."[84] For instance, myths of "national greatness, good v[ersus] evil, male prowess, individualism."[85] I believe that this forms one of the strongest arguments for the development of a local aesthetic and style of film-making – one that is in opposition to Hollywood norms. By adopting Hollywood conventions in their films, filmmakers are implicitly adopting elements of that culture too. Neither the message, nor the myth is ever completely divorced the tools that create it.

As mentioned earlier, short films often rely on the stereotype in order to communicate instantly identifiable characters in a short space of time. Certainly

[83] Mulvey, L (1989) Visual and other pleasures Bloomington: Indiana University Press
[84] Bicket, D. "Roland Barthes" k.i.s.s. *of the panopticon*, April 2003. Available URL: http://www.geneseo.edu/%7Ebicket/panop/author_B.htm#BARTHES
[85] Ibid.

one of the ways in these short films, as well as films in general, create and perpetuate myth is through these stereotypes. Many of these are merely local variations on universal themes, as evidenced in recent short films. The use of particular types reveals the themes that local filmmakers are chiefly concerned with. For instance, many films deal with the figure of the black male, who is still frequently portrayed as threatening, criminal and aggressively sexual. A variation on this is the young, intelligent black male who is bitter about the past, and seeks vengeance and equality. Both are often seen as threats to white establishment. Other threats to society take the form of rapists, criminals, xenophobes and bullies. The unrepentant racist or oppressor has taken the form of the white Afrikaner farmer or bigot in a number of films. Other particular South African types have been represented too, such as Indians and Greeks as tradesmen, or the white English-speaking middle-class as paranoid, quasi-liberals. Lower-class whites are seen as unintelligent. Victims are morally superior. Apart from the advantages these stereotypes render to the narrative, the conventions all help disseminate those myths, and inform that "cultural system of meaning." So it is significant to consider those trends and codes that are evident in recent film-making.

Independent filmmakers

At the outset of this research, it was presumed that there would be a significant divide between the films of those filmmakers working within initiatives, and those without. There is a wide scope in recent short film-making in South Africa. A few directors have stood out from the rest, but currently there does not seem to be any significant divide between 'independent' and 'institutional' filmmakers. The biggest divide between the two groups has been in terms of exposure and budget, and not content. For the most part it is only those filmmakers who work through initiatives that are getting any real exposure, and it is only those films that generally have substantial budgets. Usually, independent films are produced on

very low budgets, and are rarely seen. It was surmised that independent short filmmakers would be producing avant-garde, unconventional work, whilst those working through institutions would be forced to produce more conventional work. This has not necessarily been the case. The divide does exist, but not along the lines of institutional versus independent filmmakers. What has been found is that there is a wide range in the productions, with conventional and unconventional work being produced across the board. Some white filmmakers have been accused of generally aping Hollywood conventions and styles, particularly white student filmmakers.[86] Some black directors such as Teboho Mahlatsi, Zola Maseko and Dumisane Phakathi seem to be breaking away from the 'norms' of film production and experimenting with new styles and narratives, whilst still portraying South African realities.

Whilst the lack of a studio system excludes the independent filmmaker from being evaluated under Sarris' *auteur* theory, I will use the same criteria all the same. Namely, a 'good' director's film will have a distinct visual style and show technical competence. The film will also have an interior meaning which has arisen as a direct result of the tension between the director and the conditions of production in which he or she worked. What is lacking however is the perceived or real control that comes with an initiative. The independent filmmaker does have constraints that affect the production of films, largely attributed to the lack of support that institutional initiatives offer. In order for the independent filmmaker to shine, he has to produce work that is unique despite the challenges that face the independent filmmaker in South Africa today. That is, he has to produce a technically competent, individual work, despite budgetary constraints, inexperience, and the lack of support.

Two of the most noticeable independent short films of recent years have been *The Storekeeper* and *Clowns.* Both independent films were written, directed and produced by their creators, and they effectively show the aesthetic divide which was mentioned.

[86] From interview data.

Both films were technically well made, and both being shot on film with reasonably high budgets. Brown's film, whilst visually striking, was in many respects more of an exercise in replication. Many of the editing devices, visual keys and codes lent themselves more to music videos than the drama they were intended to enhance. Of his own admission, Brown hates South African films, saying that they are "all the same", tired, overdone and technically inferior. He doesn't believe that local filmmakers have a responsibility to develop a specifically South African aesthetic. In fact, he believes that South Africans need to perfect "normal film-making techniques"[87] before tackling a local aesthetic. Clearly Brown sees western cinema practices not only as superior, but normative, too. This attitude is reflected in the visual and narrative style of his film. *Clowns* has the glossy look of a Hollywood product, with high key lighting, and the film is on many levels comparable to US imports. However, I felt the cinematography was at times overly complex, and worked more act as a flashy visual device than enhance the storyline. The story is a surreal look at the life of an unhappy clown who has aspirations of being a 'real' actor. No social issues are tackled; and in fact the only moment that comes across as especially relevant to a local audience is the violent act at the centre of the film. But at best this event serves as little more than a contrivance for the surrealistic elements of the story. The events appear to take place in front of, rather than within their social context. This is not to say that all local films must comment on, or at least be aware of their South African context. The film takes place in Cape Town, uses South African actors and accents, but still fails to engage with the local milieu. Perhaps it is because the modes of production, the visual style, editing and narrative were too dependent on western conventions. As a result the film has a detached air about it which seems to remove it from its South African context.

The Storekeeper is a slow paced social drama about a good-natured man who is driven to taking the law into his own hands after suffering a number of burglaries at his small rural store. After the death of a night-watchman the store owner,

[87] Matthew Brown interview

played by Winston Ntshona, buys a shotgun. The shotgun is jury-rigged to create a makeshift anti-theft device, which ultimately kills a small child. The film manages, through simple and effective mise en scène and cinematography to capture a very South African look and feel in a stylish manner. The simplicity and lack of dialogue shows a certain individuality and confidence in the directing. Whilst it took a relatively bold move of excluding dialogue – something that could potentially have affected its distribution – it also made the production easier for the relative newcomer. The aim of the device, according to Hood, was to make the film more accessible to a wider South African audience. The style was a success, and was even referenced by 2002 *Edit* competition winner Lungi Dumalo in his short film *6 Numbers*.

The Storekeeper was the first South African short film to be shown by Ster-Kinekor. It enjoyed a successful run in its art-house cinema, Cinema Nouveau. The film also captured overseas attention. It won a number of awards, including The Silver Hugo at the Chicago film festival, the UNICEF trophy at Bilbao, Best Film at Algarve, a US Kodak award as Best of the Short list at Cannes and the Grand Prize at the Melbourne International Film festival.[88] The film was made to raise awareness and funds for Hood's feature film *A Reasonable Man*. Hood has since adapted and directed the Polish film *In Desert and Wilderness* (2001), which is currently Poland's number one Box Office hit for the year to date, with a $ 6.3 million take – proving Hood's abilities as a commercial director too.

The Storekeeper differs from *Clowns* chiefly in the fact that it tackles a local issue, and was explicitly located in South Africa. The two films are very different; Brown's is situated in a cosmopolitan city, Hood's in a rural area. *The Storekeeper* is essentially a 'black story', whilst *Clowns* is chiefly about its white characters. Both films do have violence as a common denominator. *Clowns* ends with a comfortable, albeit false resolution, but *The Storekeeper* leaves the viewer with a serious comment about violence in our society. The storekeeper is sent off to prison for the death of the child, but the clown's shooting disappears, as if it

[88] http://www.gavinhood.net/

were just part of a children's birthday party magic show. The surreal twist allows for the happy ending, but also dodges any commitment to the issue of violence. Indeed, *Clowns* is not necessarily a film *about* violence, but the issue of it does come up. A film is not necessarily good or bad depending on whether or not it tackles issues, but *The Storekeeper* engages with its topic in a far more effective manner, whilst also branding it as South African. Unlike Brown's film, it does not appear to shy away from its context. It embraces its cultural specificity, whilst still portraying a universal story.

As mentioned earlier, the barriers to new filmmakers are very high, resulting in very few independently produced films of a quality standard. By far the highest number of films has come from educational institutions, but the films with the highest profile have been as a result of institutional initiatives.

Institutional Initiatives

The nineties saw the inception and growth of a number of short film-making initiatives such as M-Net's *New Directions*, SABC's *Dramatic Encounters* and Channel 4's *The Short and Curlies*. During this time film-making in South Africa started to expand and gain momentum. The initiatives in particular raised the status and awareness of local film-making, with the most prolific initiative being M-Net's *New Directions*. It is the longest running developmental film initiative in Africa, and has been aimed at attracting and developing new film-making talent, particularly in the field of scriptwriting. It began in 1994, and was a way for M-Net to develop local talent whilst fulfilling its local content quota requirements. The initiative was also seen by M-Net as a way to reposition itself in the light of post-apartheid democratic change in South Africa. The company needed to be visibly supporting change, diversity and development. This initiative met with opposition, particularly from local independent producers.[89]

[89] Interview with Richard Green.

The budgets for the 30-minute short films were high, and in 1994 started at R 500 000 per South African production. Films made in other parts of Africa received budgets of R 750 000, due to the extra costs involved with shooting in countries that lacked South Africa's production infrastructure. The films were shot on 35 mm film, with a lot of emphasis being placed on the quality of the productions. The pieces had to meet the broadcast requirements of M-Net, so that they could be screened on the pay channel.

In selecting potential directors, no premium was placed on prior production experience, as the emphasis was specifically on the development of new talent. People with prior professional experience were in fact excluded from the initiative. Selection was based on a process where a group of hopeful directors all individually directed the same script in a studio situation. From that group the most promising were drawn, and invited to pitch on a number of scripts, which had been selected by a panel. Notable people such as John Kani, Moonyeenn Lee, Liza Key and Barney Simon were on the panel. In some cases directors were specifically encouraged to present treatments for projects the producers though were well suited to them. After scripts were selected by the panel, they were paired with the selected directors, who were guided by experienced producer Richard Green.

M-Net expanded the initiative to include other parts of Africa, as the company felt it didn't only have a responsibility to develop the film industry in South Africa. Where possible in Africa, Green would employ local producers and talent to aid in the development process. Much control was needed over modes of production because of the lack of education and formalised training, to ensure the quality remained high and met with M-Net's approval. However, most of the earlier films are not of remarkable quality.

A number of short films have come of the initiative, including *Angel* (Barry Berk, 1996), *An Old Wife's Tale* and *Christmas with Granny* (Dumisane Phakathi,

2000), *Come to the Bioscope* (Lance Gewer, 2000), *Cry Me A Baby*, (Tamsin MacCarthy, 1993), *Stimulation* (Andrew Worsdale, 2000), *The Apology* (Rozelle Vogelman) *The Children and I*, *Salvation* and *The Return*.[90]

The Return takes place during Diwali celebrations, and is set within the Indian community. As such that community's peoples, beliefs and customs are central to the story. The lyrical film also deals with tradition in the light of a changing world, where customs give way as couples from different cultures intermarry. The film includes mystical themes of reincarnation particular to the Hindu faith and speaks of issues within the Indian community which have for the most part gone unexamined in films in the past.

The film concerns Amir, a Hindu man, and his Muslim wife Summlaya. As a result of the union Amir has become estranged from his family. On the eve of the birth of their child, the couple visit his family for the Diwali celebrations, in the hope of reconciling their differences.

Like many South African films, violence forms an integral part of the narrative, and the father is tragically killed before the couple arrives. The Hindu family's existence is portrayed as a model of a happy community before the murder and the arrival of the couple.

The murder is the catalyst that makes Amir return to his religious roots, as he takes on his father's mantle as the head of the house. His wife's sense of unease in the alien environment is increased by his new religious fervour. Her Islamic beliefs are in conflict with the family's Hindu faith and religious rituals.

It's a promising premise, but one which was not fully realised, both in the script and the execution. The dialogue is stagy and overly descriptive. Many of the lines come across as false exposition, especially when delivered by some of the secondary or static characters. Some of the actors – particularly those playing the

[90] Ibid.

smaller roles – are visibly awkward in front of the camera. This awkwardness translates to the film as a whole, particularly in a number of scenes where the staging is obviously forced. Non verbal moments, which rely purely on the acting abilities of the performers, fall flat. As a result, the tension which should be built up throughout the film is constantly being prematurely released in badly executed scenes.

Amir's religious zeal would be understandable if he appeared even mildly affected on an emotional level by his father's death. Instead he changes directly from the loving, doting father-to-be into a deadpan, stern and controlling husband. The dialogue doesn't give any justification for this. Nor does it explain his mother's outbursts against Summlaya as anything more than religious intolerance. Many of the characters' actions come across as unmotivated. The film is let down in this regard both by the acting and the script. In one scene Summlaya places a white rose petal in a bowl of red ones. The woman who is filling the bowl with the red petals wordlessly removes the offending white one, but Summlaya merely puts another one in, which is promptly removed. In another scene Amir confronts Summlaya about a broken coffee mug. Neither scene contains dialogue, and the conflicts come across as false, let alone unmotivated. There are a many such moments in the film.

The film ends on a positive, albeit false note. The religious rituals become too much for Summlaya, and she runs out of the house. Seemingly as a result of the drama, she goes into labour and has her baby. After the baby is born, Amir's mother receives a sign that her husband is to return as a human. The denouement shows the filmmaker's particular religious bias, by implying that the child is actually the reincarnated spirit of the murdered patriarch. The 'knowledge' of this seems to mysteriously banish all Summlaya's earlier misgivings, let alone her religious beliefs.

Tamsin MacCarthy's *Cry Me A Baby* is centred on Nondwe, a midwife who yearns to have a child of her own. The only problem is that she doesn't see her

musician boyfriend Joe as a suitable parent for her child. The film deals with notions of what it is to be a 'real man' in post-apartheid South Africa.

Nondwe has to navigate minefield of men where any one can turn out to be unfaithful, abusive or carry the HIV virus. More than just an attack on men, the film explores the difficulties South Africans face trying to create stable nuclear families. If anything, Sechaba Morojele's portrayal of the sensitive Joe moves towards debunking the stereotypical view of black men as philanderers and abusers.

Nondwe's actions seem to be rather unmotivated, and as a result her character frequently comes across as irrational, and difficult to relate to. In an early scene she comes home and tells Joe she wants to have a baby. They move to the bedroom, clearly about to have sex. Nondwe then pulls out a condom and says she wants a baby, but not with Joe. Similarly, she vacillates between wanting a baby without a man, and wanting to wait until she finds the right man.

The film would perhaps have benefited from a rewrite of Dawn Garisch's script, at least to make Nondwe's actions more believable. The character is difficult to relate to, and the film seems to lurch from sequence to sequence, never really reaching a climax. There are a few moments when Nondwe's frustration peaks, spurring another dream sequence. The film makes frequent cuts to Nondwe's dream sequences in which she battles with her quest to find father for her child. There is a game show where the prize is a decent man, (though she ends up winning a baby) and a line-up where Nondwe examines possible suitors. In one particularly surrealistic moment, Nondwe has sex with Father Christmas, who offers her anything she wants. She asks for a soft skin, a BMW, jobs for Joe and her sister, a VCR and TV, and a cell phone. No mention is made of a baby or new suitor. Her dreams provide an overview of the issues she is facing, but never offer any real evidence of her development as a character. The resolution – where she decides to agree to marry Joe – seems to happen by default, due more to a softening of her resolve than any personal revelation. The final shot is of a baby

in utero, implying her impending pregnancy. Despite its shortfalls, for the most part it is a well-executed film.

To date the most successful film in terms of audience viewing to come from the initiative has been *The Pink Leather Chair*, which is currently showing in India. The feature film *Sexy Girls* (Russell Thompson, 1998) was inspired by *The Pink Leather Chair*, and grew from the success of that film. Currently negotiations are underway with an American company that wants to buy the rights to the premise of *Sexy Girls*. Another film to have continued success after *New Directions* was the social comedy *Chikin Biz'nis*. The short film was made by Khalo Matabane, but a fall-out with M-Net meant that he was not considered to direct the feature-length version. He was reported as saying "Unfortunately M-Net, like most institutions, continues to disregard black people. They think they are acting honourably because they're choosing another black person to direct it."[91] The feature film *Chikin Biz'nis – The Whole Story* (1998) was ultimately awarded to Ntshavheni Wa Luruli to direct. Both the short and feature film and were popular with audiences, and the feature is still shown at the annual National Arts Festival at Grahamstown.

New Directions has undoubtedly been the biggest and most prolific initiative in South Africa, far outnumbering the number of films made through other schemes. Once the short films were made, little was done in terms of securing cinematic release or pursuing overseas marketing opportunities. The films were shown on M-Net's pay channels, but they were seen merely as the result of training initiatives, and nothing more was done to promote the end products. Despite the few developments of some of the films into larger projects, the initiative has not made money for M-Net. As a result, apart from the few mentioned above, the films have not enjoyed much success overseas. M-Net has spent in the region of R 40 million on the initiative in the past ten years.[92] More recently some of the early *New Directions* films have been shown on SABC 1.

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[91] Quoted at *Electronic Mail & Guardian*, October 16, 1997 Available URL: http://www.chico.mweb.co.za/mg/art/reviews/97oct/16oc-mnet.html

[92] Interview with Richard Green.

Recently Zola Maseko has made *A Drink in the Passage* (2002), and *Waiting for Valdez* (2002) has been made by Dumisane Phakathi. Both films are enjoying widespread critical acclaim. Both films were selected for official competition at FESPACO 2003, with *A Drink in the Passage* winning the Best Short Jury Prize at the festival.

Maseko's *A Drink in the Passage* is adapted from a story written by Alan Paton. Set in 1960, it is about artist Edward Simelane who wins an award for one of his sculptures. This poses a problem for the apartheid-era South Africa, particularly because the award carries a sizeable cash payment. Whilst the issues of apartheid era South Africa are pivotal to the narrative, the film is actually about a connection that is made between Simelane and an Afrikaans man, van Rensburg. The two meet outside the window where Simelane's sculpture is exhibited, and strike up a conversation about the artwork. Initially suspicious, Simelane is drawn in by the man's obvious admiration of the artwork. Van Rensburg invites Simelane to have a drink at his flat, never knowing that he was actually inviting the artist himself. The hesitant Simelane agrees, probably because he knows the invitation to be genuine, and not motivated by his new-found celebrity. Due to the pass laws, van Rensurg is afraid to invite the sculptor inside. Instead they have a drink in the passage of the building. Both are nervous of being discovered. Their discussion and interaction exposes how apartheid negatively affects everybody, on both sides of the racial divide. It is a character driven story that never appears to preach to the viewer. It avoids the stereotypes and didacticism that seems to affect so many recent films that attempt to engage with the topic. There is however one moment where one feels that the film is perhaps trying too hard to be impartial, when van Rensburg's family member is all too pleased to have Simelane as a guest. The moment comes across as stagy and a bit forced. But for the most part the film rings true, on a very human level, supported by the strong performances.

There is irony in the fact that van Rensburg sees the work to be as a result of divine inspiration, and says that the artist who created it must have an element of the divine within him. In apartheid South Africa, it is ironic that such a comment should be spoken about a black man. Simelane leaves, with van Rensburg never knowing who he truly is. This moment reflects the friendship that never was, that could not be in apartheid South Africa.

The film does not attempt any major narrative shifts, nor does it employ any flashy film techniques. The narrative stays close to real time; the film takes place over a short period of time with a measured pace that never lags. Maseko's film steers clear of tired stereotypes, and as a result the viewer is able to make a real connection with the characters.

It is a well executed, atmospheric film with a solid script at its heart. It has an undeniable style and confident pace that shows Maseko's skill as a director.

Waiting for Valdez is a film about the art of story telling, and is mostly set around a fire where children gather to tell stories. It is also a period piece, set in 1972 in Western Township. The film gets its name from the film *Valdez is Coming* (Edwin Sherin, 1971) with Burt Lancaster. Sharkey is an 11 year old boy who experiences cinema through Tox and Faya, who sneak into the movie-house and charge to narrate the films back to their friends around the fire.

Sharkey lives with his doting grandmother, whilst his parents stay in Eldorado Park due to the segregation laws. His grandmother looks after him, and the privileged existence makes Sharkey the focus of teasing by his less-fortunate friends.

Waiting for Valdez is presented in black and white, with the only colour present in the Burt Lancaster movie poster. This device enhances the bleakness of the landscape and the social documentary feel of the film. The film engages with the social problems that inherently plagued the apartheid state, in townships where the

only escape is through the church or the shebeens. The film is full of colourful characters, like Ous Nana, whose gaiety serves as a respite from the poverty and glum surroundings of the township. But as with many things in the township, the happiness is just a façade. Ous Nana is a tragic character, an alcoholic who stays indoors in order to preserve her complexion so that she can pass for 'coloured,' and be able to move to Eldorado Park. The film portrays a society where alcoholism is rife, and families are split up along racial lines. The best entertainment comes from the ancient art of oral storytelling around an open fire. The film is about the importance of community and social experience.

Despite the awkward moments which invariably arise from using non-professional actors and children, the film is a touching story about life in the townships. Phakathi's direction, and the sensitive portrayal of Ma Katie by Dolly Rathebe render a very human feel to the film. Like *A Drink in the Passage*, *Waiting for Valdez* is a sensitive film which shows the effects of the political on ordinary people, through the personal experiences of realistic characters. *Waiting for Valdez* has been called "a triumph of humanity and aesthetics" and "the epiphany of the last decade" by Darryl Accone.[93] Mbye Cham, a well-known critic and African film theorist, is championing Dumisane Phakathi as the definition of new South African film-making.[94]

According to Richard Green, who was one of the initiators of the *New Directions* project and executive producer of all the short films, there was surprisingly little editorial control from M-Net, despite the potentially sensitive political situation of the time. Scripts were not censored directly by M-Net; rather it was up to a panel of judges to select the scripts.

Originally the main focus of *New Directions* was on short film production, and over thirty short films have come of the initiative. It was however felt that people were being developed that had "nowhere to go"[95] so the focus shifted to feature

[93] Accone, D. "Framed by real life" *Mail&Guardian,* April 23 to 29 2004.
[94] Interview with Richard Green.
[95] "The South African Film And Television Industry Report." Pp. 73.

film production. Despite this apparent shift, only two feature films, *Chikin Biz'nis – The Whole Story* and *Sexy Girls*, have been developed and filmed as a result of the initiative. This shift to feature film production obviously occurred because the short film was seen as limited in its scope. *New Directions* is still producing short films but the purported ultimate aim seems to be to make feature films.

Both *A Drink in the Passage* and *Waiting for Valdez* are beautifully filmed and executed. It is the solid scripts that form their foundations which, apart from the directors' skills, are probably the most significant factors in the films' successes. The films represent a divergence from the rest of the *New Directions* films, which have been mostly unremarkable. It is only recently, after a number of years and many short films that the overall quality of the films from the initiative has improved. Hopefully the films herald the arrival of world-class local film-making. Phakathi and Maseko's films represent the maturation of M-Net's substantial investment, proving the value of continued institutional support through initiatives like *New Directions*.

The Short and Curlies

The South African *Short and Curlies* short film initiative resulted in the production of five short films, which were all shot on 35 mm film. The scheme was originally a UK initiative, which was brought out to South Africa by Channel 4. The project was produced by Jeremy Nathan and Big World Cinema, with financial assistance from The Department Of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology. The films were much shorter – eleven minutes – than those made by *New Directions*. Obviously the shorter format had its advantages, and a result the films were visually striking, punchy and concise works that generally told simple tales very effectively. *The Short and Curlies* also represented the varied film voices that were starting to emerge in the New South Africa, with a wide range of subject matter. The films made under the initiative are diverse and representative

in terms of aesthetic, content and filmmakers. The films are *The Vow* (Junaid Ahmmed), *Husk* (Jeremy Handler), *Watercolours* (Nantie Steyn), *Lucky Day* (Brian Tilley) and *Portrait of a Young Man Drowning* (Teboho Mahlatsi). All of the films are credited as being produced in 1999.[96]

The short form is reliant on every moment of screen time, and these shorts all demonstrate the succinct writing, focussed directing and precise acting abilities necessary to convey a lot of information in a short space of time.

Junaid Ahmed's *The Vow* is a film set in the Kwa-Zulu Natal Indian community, and centres on a fathers religious vow he takes in order to cure his mute son. The film is lyrical, and beautifully shot, enhancing the sacred symbolism of the colourful festival.

Lucky Day is an entertaining film that touches on some very relevant South African issues, but manages to do it in a darkly comical way. It also shows disenfranchised, impoverished white South Africans, and centres on a bizarre experience that a casual worker has when he is picked up by a farmer. Lucky is employed to witness the farmer's suicide, so that the farmer can absolve himself of a murder. The inclusion of veteran South African actor Ian Roberts helped make the film convincing.

Husk centres on a destitute father and daughter in the countryside who owe a villainous landlord money. The film reflects a seemingly inherent violence which has come to characterise South Africa in recent years. The plot revolves around on the daughter (Nicola Hannekom) who exacts her revenge on the landlord when she is forced to defend herself from his sexual advances. The scenes of the daughter's trauma are inter-cut with images of her ineffectual father flicking coins into a bottle in the local bar. *Husk* was in main short competition at the 1999 Cannes Film Festival, which was a first for a South African film. It was also won

[96] This does not seem correct, as there is some discrepancy – dates range from 1997 to 1999.

awards for Direction, Camera, Editing and Actors Performance at the NTVA Stone Awards.

Watercolours is set in 1989, during South Africa's state of emergency. It is about the racist Mayor of Krugersdorp (Bill Flynn), who buys the local public swimming pool which he also manages so that his love interest (Jana Cilliers) can continue swimming happily without fear of the black public joining her. Visually the film is very striking, with its primary coloured art direction and meticulous mise en scène, which enhances 'perfect', pristine dream world the mayor lives in. The black protesters in the streets that are threatening this world are well juxtaposed with the crystal clear swimming pool. Unfortunately the film resorts to tired stereotypes; the racist, the idiot, the liberal. The mayor's unattractive political ideology is reflected in his short, overweight body and balding head. He casts a tragic-comic figure as he struggles to impress his love interest, and in the last scene he has to drive his car to catch her. The white pool cleaner (in a protected work environment) is virtually mute. Both men lust after the attractive – and liberal – woman. The distinction between good and evil is once again conveniently drawn along the visually attractive/ugly divide. The film is for the most part well written, but is unfortunately marred by a false climax. This is exemplified in the last line, when Jana Cilliers' character rejects the man's gesture by taking up running instead of swimming. Her simple rejection is obviously a symbolic political choice. She is not only rejecting Flynn's character, but the white-supremacy rule of the country too. The text comes across as overly didactic and false. This demonstrates the short form's limitations for narrative arcs and character development. Given more screen-time, the film would have had more opportunity to develop the narrative and characters, and afford a more relevant ending.

On of the most notable films to come out of the initiative, and indeed South Africa in recent years, has been Teboho Mahlatsi's critically acclaimed *Portrait of a Young Man Drowning.* Many regard the film as one of South Africa's most exciting short films of recent years. It is a dark, gritty film set in South Africa's

harsh township life. Whilst all the films made under *The Short and Curlies* are of a very high standard, *Portrait* is by far the most individual of the collection, and shows Mahlatsi's personal vision and influence. The film is different from a number of angles. The visual style for one is unusual, and is matched by the strident music that was used. Both work well to enhance the harshness of the township landscape. The visual style is the most obvious indicator of a divergence from the norms of local film-making. Many young local directors would choose to maximise the opportunity to use 35mm film to all it's aesthetic advantage. Typically the results would have been high key, visually bright, lustrous works. Indeed this was the case with the other films from the *Short and Curlies* initiative, such as *Watercolours* and *Lucky Day*. Mahlatsi's film deviates from that standard, as he eschews the typical comfortable look along with high key lighting and bright colouring. The film does not shy away from the tough township landscape it is set in, nor does it attempt to glamorise it. Dead dogs, burning cars and ruined buildings litter the scene. The washed out, stark visuals are used to great effect to situate the film in its uniquely South African setting. But it is not only the visual style that sets *Portrait* apart.

Notably, it was shot in Xhosa, and had English subtitles – a fact which hasn't apparently affected its popularity – even on AtomFilms' website.[97] Mahlatsi wanted a 'real' feel to the film – and used the filmic elements extremely well in reflecting the protagonist's psychological turmoil. The narrative follows Shadow, a known killer in the township, who needs to clean a septic stab wound. He is an interesting character that doesn't fit into any obvious stereotype. He is an anti-hero, trying to change his ways. The act of cleaning is not just physical; it is a quest for redemption. Seeking this redemption, he decides to go to the funeral of his most recent victim. The local community constantly thwarts his intentions to cleanse himself, from people who won't allow him to bathe in their house, to the holy man who won't give him water. As Shadow battles to absolve himself of his

[97] The significance of this relates to the fact that the AtomFilms website screens films in a very small, low resolution format, to enable web streaming. This makes subtitles hard, if not impossible to read. Add to this the fact that most of the website's visitors would be English speakers, and would therefore not understand Xhosa.

sins, the community "kangaroo court" brings another convict to him, their chosen executioner. He is caught in an endless cycle of violence. The community is party to his failed attempts to gain absolution. The same people who shun him for murder bring a rapist to him for justice. When he can't murder the man, and asks why he should, the answer is, "Because you're the killer dog." The film frequently alternates between third person views, and views from Shadow's fantasies or dreams. Most images of Shadow trying to wash his hands, but the water constantly turns red. For some time the viewer is unsure if they are analepsis (flashback) views from his last murder, prophetic prolepsis (flash-forward) or hallucinations. They are surrealistic sequences that reflect Shadow's inner turmoil, symbolised by his vain attempts to wash his hands clean. The film ends with Shadow's face emerging from blood-red water.

Mahlatsi had already had success with *Portrait of a Young Man Drowning* before *Yizo Yizo* was screened on television. Ronnie Nyakale, who also acted as gangster Papa Action in the television series, played Shadow in *Portrait*. *Portrait* was in competition in the Venice Film Festival in 1999, and went on to win the Silver Lion for Best Short Film.[98]

All of the films from the initiative have enjoyed a high level of success, and a number of awards have been won between them. *Lucky Day*, *Husk* and *Portrait of a Young Man Drowning* have been screened at Cannes, Palm Springs, Telluride, Edinburgh, Raindance, Rio de Janeiro, Toronto, Nantes and Sithengi film festivals.[99]

Nathan acknowledges the difficulty in finding platforms for short films, and felt that AtomFilms was on of the best options available for wide viewership. The series secured distribution with AtomFilms on the Internet and on some airlines for five years. Atom's business partners include HBO, Sundance Channel,

[98] "Jeremy Nathan, Producer", Avatar Digital. No Date Given. Available URL: http://www.ballistic.co.za/dv8/gfx/avatar.html

[99] Pearson, B. "AtomFilms inks dist'n deal", *Variety*, February 17 2000. Available URL: http://print.google.com/print/doc?articleid=2ExTUJzyIoF

Infoseek, @Home, Warner Bros. Online and Reel.com. The films have enjoyed success on the AtomFilms website, with the films generally scoring highly with audiences. Nathan viewed the deal as "a true reflection of the route for African filmmakers to succeed in an economically and creatively competitive world entertainment industry."[100]

Apart from the fact that the films were much shorter, this initiative differed from *New Directions* in that directors and producers were selected on the basis of prior experience, so the general standards could have been expected to be higher. It purported to be more of a scriptwriting development initiative, whereas *New Directions* was focussed on both directing and scriptwriting development.

The initiative was also expensive with a budget of R 500 000 per script. This was partially due to the fact that the films were shot on 35 mm film. The initiative was only partially funded locally, through the SABC. The rest of the funding came jointly from Channel 4 (UK), Miramax (USA) and Kodak.[101]

Dramatic Encounters

SABC's answer to M-Nets *New Directions* initiative saw the production of six ten minute short stories which were screened on SABC in 1999. The project was devised and led by renowned British writer, director and producer Alby James. It was intended to address a lack of knowledge and experience of film-making, through training people "with cinematic potential."[102] The initiative received more than 850 applications, and eventually worked with twelve new scriptwriters, six trainee directors and six trainee producers. The initiative was coupled with an intensive training process.

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[100] EDITION 57. 22 February 2000. Available URL: http://www.africafilmtv.com/pages/newsflash/2001/eng2001/nf57.htm
[101] "The South African Film And Television Industry Report." Pp. 74.
[102] Ibid.

As with the other initiatives, *Dramatic Encounters*' main aim was to promote diversity and development. Films were made in a number of languages, including Zulu, Venda, Sotho and 'tsotsitaal'. The films were not remarkable, and weren't favourably reviewed, least of all by Andrew Worsdale, who said most of the films relied on "stale generalities", were "clumsy" and "stereotypical."[103]

Films to come of this initiative have been *Markowitz* (Sechaba Morajele), *Mountains are Falling* (Eugene Paramoer), *Heads or Tails*, *The Caretaker*, *Lotus Dreaming* (written by Tanya Mudaly) and *Is Chandis Maar is O'right* (Bongani Linda)[104]

The ultimate aim was long-term development of future filmmakers. Caroline Carew, one of the program leaders said, "We want to encourage those writers, producers and directors who were involved in this *Dramatic Encounters* and hopefully reach the point where we'll be doing full-length dramas with them."[105]

On a per-minute basis, the films were about the same cost as M-Net's *New Directions* films. However, the overall cost was actually higher, because the process included an intensive training process for the trainee directors, producers and scriptwriters. The process was marred by a number of events, not least of all the cutting of a major portion of the training budget. The films were of a low standard as a result, despite having fairly high costs-per-minute. Each film had two weeks of pre-production, a four-day shoot and three weeks of post-production.

Alby James outlined a number of problems with the initiative, some of which have been included later on in this report.

[103] Worsdale, A. "Short films fall short", *ZA@play*, 9 September 1999. Available URL: http://www.chico.mweb.co.za/mg/art/film/9909/990909-shortfilms.html
[104] Ibid. See Filmography
[105] Ibid. Worsdale

STEPS for the future

STEPS (Social Transformation and Empowerment Projects) is an international education-based initiative concerned with the effects of HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa. The initiative has made a number of short films aimed at educating people about the realities of HIV/AIDS. One of the short fiction films, *The Sky in Her Eyes*, directed by Ouida Smit and Madoda Ncayiyana, was made in South Africa. It is important to note that it doesn't appear that any of the production funding came from South African broadcasters or government. The funding came from the governments of Finland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands for training, production and distribution. International Broadcasters were also involved, as well as the Soros Foundation, Danish and Finnish Film Institutes, One World Group of Broadcasters and Nokia, which was supporting the training of young filmmakers.[106]

Though its outcomes are HIV/AIDS education oriented, the initiative does aid in film development because it used both first-time and experienced directors to direct the projects. One of its primary aims, after AIDS education, was "[t]o provide invaluable training to Southern African filmmakers with the support of some of the best filmmakers drawn from around the world."[107] Through this initiative many new directors have been given exposure for the first time. *The Sky in Her Eyes* was screened by Ster-Kinekor before *Whale Rider* in its cinemas. Unfortunately it seems that the creators missed out on an opportunity to capitalise on the support that comes from being involved with a large initiative. Clearly the organisers were willing to allow a certain degree of freedom, and the film has a lyrical and expressive style. Unfortunately this style is marred by very low production value, particularly in terms of image quality. The visual aesthetic of the film certainly doesn't do the 16mm film format justice. Format isn't to blame for the poor image quality; the picture is grainy and dull, lessening the effect of the potentially striking green hills and blue sky of the Natal midlands. The central

[106] From "STEPS for the future: What is it all about?", Available URL: http://www.dayzero.co.za/steps/project/project_FAQ.htm
[107] Ibid.

motif of the kite bedecked with the brightly coloured child's drawing and red ribbon would have had a much deeper impact had the colours been effectively captured. Instead what should have been a beautiful, sad story ended up striking me as an uncomfortable, visually unappealing documentary look-alike. Effective shooting would have enhanced the film's stylistic choices.

The film did however win the Djibril Diop Mambety award in the Directors' Fortnight at the Festival de Cannes[108] – the first South African film to do so. At the 20th Annual Chicago Children's Film Festival it got second place for the Children's Jury Prize for a Live-Action Television Production, and a Certificate of Merit from the Adult Jury Prizes section.

Mama Africa

Mama Africa was an M-Net-Zimmedia co-production produced by Simon Bright. As the name suggests the films all focussed on women in Africa. As such the films constitute some of the few films made by and for women. The directors were women from Nigeria, South Africa, Namibia, Burkina Faso, Tunisia and Zimbabwe. The films were all 26 minutes in length, and shot on 35 mm film.

The South African film was *Raya* (2001) by Zulfah Otto-Sallies. The film is named after its main character, who joins a gang on the Cape Flats at a very young age. After having a child in prison, she starts to appreciate the hardship in bringing up a child in a difficult society, and tries to build a better lie for her daughter. The film is by no means light entertainment. It deals with many difficult issues, including teenage pregnancy and sexual abuse. When she finds out her baby has been abused by a fellow gang member, Raya kills him. Left little choice, Raya eventually turns herself in to the police after leaving her child with her mother. She sacrifices her freedom, but gives her child a chance of life away

[108] From URL:
http://www.e.bell.ca/filmfest/2003/filmsandprogrammes/description.asp?pageID=film&id=173

from the ganglands. Ultimately the film affirms the value of community and family.

The films were marketed to television stations as a possible series, with the 26-minute format supposed to favour television-scheduling well. The series was also pitched for cinematic release as two 90-minute programs. Mama Africa was expected to do better than most short film initiatives because the films were all produced under one theme. This was expected to make the package more marketable. It was hoped that this packaging would overcome the short form's bad distribution record. However, the series did not do well when Ster-Kinekor released it locally.

Midgets

In 2002 Kryptonite Productions embarked on a short film initiative that planned to produce six six-minute short films, with the aim of having them screened before main features at Ster-Kinekor and Cinema Nouveau cinemas. Jon Savage, who started the production company, is also the initiator of the Midgets initiative. Previously working as a commercials director, he decided that the company should be investing in local film production. The scripts have been selected from a group of about 360[109] entries, with high entertainment value as one of the main requisites. Savage believes that South Africa is not ready to make feature length films, citing *Promised Land* as an example. He believes that South Africa needs to make short, well produced films that generate public support, whilst developing local talent at the same time.

The initiative has received very favourable responses from the film-making community. For this, the first set of films, Savage hopes to employ whom he views as "the six best directors" he could involve with the venture. It has

[109] Interview with Jon Savage and Helen Moses. "What makes a script work" *The Writing Studio*. Available URL: http://www.writingstudio.co.za/page105.html

attracted interest from many eminent South African filmmakers, a number of whom are tentatively attached to the project. Currently Teboho Mahlatsi, Matthew Brown, Norman Maake and Robin Cowie[110] have been mentioned as possible directors of some of the shorts. As the series becomes established and grows in popularity, new less experienced film directors will be given opportunities to direct new shorts. In theory the best short films plan to be made into feature length films, as the Midgets become more established. Hopefully the popularity of the original shorts will secure ticket sales for the feature films.

The final scripts have been selected, but it seems the submissions were plagued by the same problems that *Dramatic Encounters* experienced. Of the entries that were received, very few were original. Helen Moses said that "70 % of the films contained a rape, a murder, a death, the grim reaper […] or all four."[111] Most of the scriptwriters also failed to stick to standard formatting techniques, and many of the scripts didn't even have the authors' names on them.

A distribution arrangement has been made with Ster-Kinekor, but according to Helen Kuun the company has reserved the right to not show the films should they not be of a certain quality. The programme also received support from the NFVF, to the tune of R 300 000.[112] With the short film budgets of R 200 000 per script, this was not nearly enough for the six films. Funding for the rest of the project had been reached with the South African branch of a major alcoholic beverage brand, but unfortunately the company reneged on its commitment. As a result the project has been put on hold indefinitely.

The initiators, like most local filmmakers, have found that while potential investor companies have been very interested in their project, it has proven very difficult to secure investment in local film-making.

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[110] Producer, *Blair Witch Project*, 1999
[111] Ibid. *The Writing Studio*
[112] NFVF Production Grants: 2003/2004 Available URL: http://www.nfvf.co.za

Educational Institutions

The short form is an excellent training ground, and is often referred to as "finger exercises" for future filmmakers. Most interviewees felt that short film-making forms an essential part of a filmmaker's training and experience. Consequently, students in Film and Television training colleges and schools make many of the short films that are produced in South Africa. Unfortunately most of these projects do not get wider a showing than within their institutions.

The school with the highest profile in South Africa is undoubtedly AFDA, which is the most prolific educational producer of short films. The business has recently opened a new campus in Cape Town. The school places a strong emphasis on audience research, and projects go through a rigorous review process before being allowed into production. This is to promote knowledge of and respect for standard production techniques. Film-making is approached from a marketing angle, and projects have to have audience appeal. In fact, a large proportion of a student's final mark is based on the audience's rating of the film.

Garth Holmes, one of the school's founding directors, says that over 200 short films have been produced in the ten years that the school has been in existence. Many of these have been shot on Super16, 16 mm or 35 mm film stock. A number of AFDA films have been shown on M-Net, such as *Skitterwit* (Danie Bester 2001) and *Stof* (Kobus Roos, 1999). The majority of the films are of student-level quality, but recently a number of the shorts have been enjoying success and accolades at festivals around the world. Most notably, *Black Sushi* (Dean Blumberg, 2002), was recently awarded the special Jury Prize at the 14th Milan African Film Festival. The prize was the home video distribution rights in Italy for the short film. The film also won at the Apollo Film Festival in 2003, and has been "screened at over twenty festivals worldwide."[113] It was also the

[113] From "Local short film wins Jury Prize at Milan Film Festival", Biz Community, 12 April 2004. Available URL: http://www.biz-community.com/Snippet/196/17/1727.html

'Bluefire International' at the 8th Manchester International Short Film Festival,[114] which is the runner-up for the Best International Short Film award.

A common theme in many of the films made at AFDA has been the transition from the 'old' to 'new' South Africa, with issues of redemption and forgiveness for apartheid sins featuring strongly. In particular, many of the student films have been largely dominated by Afrikaner themes of identity, as evidenced by *Skitterwit, Stof, Triomfeer* (Jan Hendrik Beetge, 2000), and *Angels and Boereoorloë* (Wickus Strijdom).

Skitterwit is about an Afrikaans schoolboy rugby player, who loses his place on the team to his new next-door neighbour, a black student. He has to deal with losing his place as 'the cool kid' at school, as well as coping with his alcoholic, racist father who has been retrenched from his job. The end of the film sees the protagonist accepting his new place in South African society – and rejecting his father's racist views. He is happy, and free, able to accept his new position where he is literally sidelined – both on and off the rugby field. Similarly, *Triomfeer* is about an Afrikaans man living with his terminally ill, racist father in Triomf, formerly Sophiatown. Their existence is shattered when a black family 'comes home' to the place they lived before being forcibly removed. As the father dies, so does the 'old,' with the son accepting the new South Africa.

Holmes sees the films as being an indicator of society in general; Afrikaans people are dealing with the prospect of losing their identity, and with notions of guilt and reconciliation.[115] Rather, the films are more indicative of the student demographics of AFDA than of general society. If the films coming out of AFDA are anything to go by, AFDA is, like the film industry, still white male (and Afrikaans) dominated. However, this does seem to be changing, and recently AFDA student Norman Maake has enjoyed successes and recognition with his short film *Home Sweet Home* (1999). He has recently completed his first feature, *Soldiers of the Rock.* (2003), which has been called a "a student tour de force. In

[114] Ibid. Biz Community
[115] Garth Holmes interview

honest terms, it realistically portrays life in South Africa's mines, recalling countless films where the human spirit triumphs…"[116]

Blumberg's *Black Sushi* is about a black ex-convict who tries, and eventually succeeds in working for traditional Japanese man in his sushi bar. Again, as with most AFDA films, the denouement is a happy cross-cultural situation with co-habitation and mutual respect.

Holmes also stresses that AFDA strives to not replicate Hollywood, and tries to make "culturally profound" works of art. That is, the school does not stress strict adherence to Western conventions and visual styles. Indeed, for the most part they do succeed in avoiding the glossy feel of Hollywood products, and many of their films have most recently had dark, gritty looks to match the typically conflicted emotional states of their characters.

As with all short films, the AFDA shorts are culturally relevant works because they illustrate the current cultural identities of those filmmakers, and can be seen as possible indicators of the future trends of film-making in South Africa.

EdiT

Edit (Emerging Dynamics in Television) is M-Net's other development initiative, which caters specifically for film and television students. The categories that are accepted are Drama, Quiz or Game Show, Documentary and Reality TV. Though the initiative is not specifically aimed at short film-making, the majority of final projects are short fiction pieces. The competition is open to final years students "attached to educational institutions or professional associations who actively support the development of skills in film or video production."[117] Ten successful proposals each receive a budget of R 25 000 for the production, which has to be

[116] Sithengi website. Available URL: http://www.sithengi.co.za/2003/forum_entries/000018.php
[117] "Competition Brief", *Edit*. 2003. Available URL: http://www.mnet.co.za/edit/brief.asp

between 8 and 15 minutes in length. In the application process, students are encouraged to "research and be aware of M-Net's demographic and audience profile" when creating their program. No professional creative input is allowed, but a professional has to be present to act as a supervisor or mentor throughout the production process. The projects are reviewed by M-Net's project supervisor for offline approval before being allowed to progress to the online stage.

The substantial prize of R 50 000 awarded to the institution with the best overall project provides a strong incentive for students to succeed. Predictably, the quality of the productions is usually fairly low, but the competition provides students with invaluable real-life production experience, as well as exposure on M-Net.

This initiative also raises status of the local film industry, and stimulates younger people interested in a career in film and television, because it makes the industry more accessible. This initiative will no doubt aid in the development of future film-making talent. In years to come the entries should improve in quality and become more competitive, as the general status and quality of the industry improves.

Script development

One of the main issues filmmakers and commentators have seen as holding the local industry back is a serious lack of script development. It is another legacy of apartheid that has resulted from a lack of language and writing skills development, particularly amongst the black population. The good response by applicants to the *Dramatic Encounters* initiative was marred by the fact that out of the more than seven hundred applicants, only "about twelve of the applicants"

actually completed their applications correctly.[118] Writing for the screen is a very specific form of literacy. New storytellers cannot be expected to write effectively for film, and appreciate the finer points of scriptwriting, if they don't even have a good general level of literacy and comprehension.

The Nigerian film market is extremely successful because it is market-driven, and the films have popular appeal. As has been stated a number of times, the local industry is still very white–dominated across the board. A number of black filmmakers are outspoken about this, and Zola Maseko is quoted as saying,

> "*All the films about us, the black South Africans, are made by whites. Never by us. Now that we have the means to tell our own stories, no one is interested. My frustration no doubt shows how little things have changed. The majority of films produced by the new South Africa are white. Why? Because black people have no access to the means of production, which are still in the hands of the white minority.*" [119]

He who pays the piper calls the tune. One of the central problems facing local film distribution and acceptance by audiences is the fact that there is a shortage of stories that speak of black or non-white experience. Programs like *Yizo Yizo* are hugely successful because viewers can relate to the content. The film industry needs to follow television's example in order to enjoy the same local success. There is a serious lack of local knowledge about writing for screen, which will only improve with education and, more importantly, experience.

It is the scriptwriters who conceptualise new ideas, create characters and present local realities on the screen. Black writers are needed to write effectively about black realities in South Africa. The South African Script Writers Association (SASWA) is trying to address the lack of black writers in its organisation, but says this is proving difficult. The association is only about 35% black,[120] and

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[118] Ibid. James
[119] Maseko, Z. (2003) "Freedom on Paper." Available URL: http://www.africultures.com/anglais/articles_anglais/40maseko.htm
[120] Masilela, J. "Screenwriters still racially divided", *ZA@Play*, 14 April 2000. Available URL: http://www.chico.mweb.co.za/mg/art/film/0004/000414-screenwriters.html

there seem to be tensions between SASWA and The Black Film and Video Association (BFVA) that appear to be preventing a collaboration or merger.[121]

The visual medium is incredibly powerful when it comes to the development of a national identity, because of its ability to create and propagate icons and myth. One would have expected it to be a much more prevalent theme in the New South Africa, particularly considering the national motto; *"!KE E:/XARRA //KE"– "Diverse Peoples Unite."* The promotion of national unity has certainly been one of the most extolled virtues of local sport in the last ten years. Whilst many sports such as soccer and rugby remain divided along race lines, films have the ability to elucidate and examine national issues of identity. They create national icons, characters, heroes and myths.

Deconstructionist theorists view Nationalism and ethnicity as "essentially artificial constructs […] capricious imagined communities that float out of the new forms of media that have spread with economic modernization." Nationalism and ethnicity are called 'imagined communities' because

> *"the members of even the smallest nations will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives an image of their community."*[122]

No matter how whimsical the idea may be, it is clearly a powerful tool for any country to have and utilise. The theme of nationalism or of a clear South African identity is conspicuous in its absence from local film-making.

The mythologizing of South Africa needs to happen. We know the American football jock, New York taxi driver or cowboy all to well through American movies. There are countless local icons that haven't been explored extensively in

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[121] For more information on this effort, read Masilela, J. "Screenwriters still racially divided", *ZA@Play*, 14 April 2000. Available URL: http://www.chico.mweb.co.za/mg/art/film/0004/000414-screenwriters.html

[122] Benedict Anderson, quoted in "Nationalism, National Identity" at *k.i.s.s. of the panoption*. 27 February 2001. Available URL: http://www.geneseo.edu/%7Ebicket/panop/topicsnat.htm

the local media, such as the sangoma, the ex-MK fighter or the South African policeman.

> *"Though subject to alteration and development, it is these stereotypes that form the web of collective myths and memories that are the stuff of national identity, built up over centuries and as old as human society itself."*[123]

Indeed we could mention Nelson Mandela and other well known political icons, but these figures are not media icons *per se*, at least not in the sense that film icons are. There have been a few local film icons that have gained international recognition, such as Henry Cele's Shaka Zulu[124] or Jamie Uys' portrayal of the San Bushmen in *The Gods Must Be Crazy* (1989). However, these icons are outdated don't adequately reflect South Africa's current socio-political milieu. Recently these films have been criticised for being racist and inaccurate. There was much public disapproval recently when SABC re-aired the *Shaka Zulu* series. South Africa needs to embrace and perpetuate its own, new and relevant national icons.

The status of local culture needs to be raised, and it needs to be seen as the national commodity that it is. Films are products of culture, and film-making is able to update and build upon existing local identities, as well as create new ones. As such, films also act as preservers of local culture.

Exporting local films will raise South Africa's status in the international arena, as well as stimulating and providing the necessary income the local industry needs to develop and grow.

Roland Barthes also wrote on what he called the "ideal text", which was one that could be read in any sequence; one where the meaning is not dependent on a linear order of reading. It is a "multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash." In this "ideal text […] is a

[123] Anderson, B.
[124] *Shaka Zulu* (William C. Faure, Joshua Sinclair. 1987)

galaxy of signifiers not a structure of signifieds." I believe that a body of films can act like this "ideal text" because the short film supports multiple narratives, which converge from a number of different realities. The body of work can be accessed from any point. That is, from any film. He writes that "a text's unity lies not in its origin, but in its destination," and so the viewer of the texts – in this case the short films – is the one that produces meaning. This is especially interesting when considering the role film-making plays in myth-making. A collection of short films functions by permitting the creation of local myths. Because of the relatively high number of short films, the short film works more effectively in this role than the feature film. The more exposure short films get the better, because of their wide range of input.

Development in the area of script editing and script reading is also lacking. It is no good having scripts being written in languages other than English if there is a lack of experienced readers who can understand those languages. The local industry requires a larger pool of readers, which would be more representative of the various languages and cultures of South Africa. Alby James suggested that South Africa needs to put script assessing "on a very professional basis throughout the sector as soon as possible."[125] Professional readers who are able to effectively appraise new scripts in languages other than English are needed. But predictably money is a major issue, and the problem has its roots in a general lack of local infrastructure.

Initiatives like *New Directions*, the *South African Screenwriters Laboratory* (SCRAWL) and *Dramatic Encounters* are no doubt helping with this. SCRAWL is an intensive script development workshop using tutors from the United Kingdom, The United States and Africa. It has been in operation for a number of years, hosting labs with professionals from the industry. The group focuses on "practical script analysis rather than theoretical discussion" and encourages stories rooted in the "social and cultural background of the writer."[126] SCRAWL helps to encourage local writing ability by holding these scriptwriting courses and

[125] Ibid. James. Pp. 3
[126] http://www.nfvf.co.za/Training/LNS%20home.htm

workshops. In 2004 the association held its 5th Annual South African Screenwriters Lab, with notable writer/directors Anthony Minghella[127] and Oliver Parker[128] acting as tutors. Unfortunately the lab was only attended by a select group of eighteen established local filmmakers and writers. Clearly this will not benefit new talent. On the other hand SASWA specifically helps in developing local writing talent by providing support structures and forums for both professional and budding writers.

Despite South Africa having a number of notable writers such as Nadine Gordimer, J.M. Coetzee and Athol Fugard, little seems to be thought of writing as a profession in its own right. Currently there is a perception that scriptwriters are severely undervalued in this country. Pay is low – between "about R 5 000 and R 20 000 per script."[129] Writing is time-consuming, and typically a writer would have to write in addition to maintaining a day-job in order to be able to support him/herself. As a general rule of thumb, it is believed that a treatment for a feature-length film should take about four months. Another two months is required to develop a first draft.[130] This is a considerable amount of time to work on a project for such low rates of pay.

For every twelve feature films that are proposed only one gets made, and for every seven that get made, only one makes a profit.[131] Figures don't seem to be available that can suggest how many scripts are actually written that don't even make it to the proposal stage, but logically one can assume that the number is large. It would be a logical assumption that significantly more scripts would have to be written in order to have a reasonable number of decent possibilities for production. Only if the volume of scripts is increased dramatically can we expect to start getting the number of scripts needed. But with scriptwriting being underpaid, it is unlikely that this will happen until it becomes viable to work

[127] Writer/Director credits include *Cold Mountain* 2003, *The Talented Mr. Ripley* 1999, *The English Patient* 1996.
[128] Writer/Director credits include *The Importance of Being Earnest* 2002, *An Ideal Husband* 1999
[129] "The South African Film And Television Industry Report." Pp.72.
[130] Ibid. Pp. 9.
[131] "Cultural Industries Growth Strategy" Pp. 23.

specifically as writers. Television drama programs like *Yizo Yizo*, *Generations*, *Isidingo* and *Backstage* are employing a number of writers, and providing them with invaluable experience. But with the current state of film-making in South Africa, it is not feasible for writers to concentrate on writing for films exclusively.

In the same way that the short film offers directors essential experience in the basics of film production, the short film undoubtedly gives scriptwriters the same invaluable grounding. And for the same reasons, the short film favours diversity and development in scriptwriting, too.

Chapter Five Finance

It is clear that the film industry is ready to grow, but a number of issues still hold it back. The weight of evidence suggests that one of the main obstacles facing the film industry is a lack of funding and finance. Unfortunately investor confidence in film-making is very low. Historically South African films are not good investments, so do not inspire confidence in the local industry. Typically, an investor can expect to wait 48 months before seeing returns[132] – if there are any – on a film investment.

As previously stated, the government currently supports the film industry directly to the tune of about R 21 million per year, through the NFVF. According to the "Estimates of National Expenditure" documents from the governmental web pages, The Department of Arts and Culture is due to receive R 926 527 000 for the 2003/04 year.[133] This is a large amount of money – considerably more than the amount to be appropriated for Sport and Recreation (R 225 762 000).[134] However, the DACT governs a large number of areas, including:

- Arts, Culture and Language in Society
- Cultural Development and International Relations
- Heritage, National Archives and National Library Services

By far the highest amount of money allocated by the DACT goes to Heritage, National Archives and the National Library Services.

> *"Transfers to heritage institutions (R 486 million in 2003/04 and bolstered by large allocations for Freedom Park over the medium term) are more than twice the value of transfers to arts and culture institutions (R 180 million in 2003/04)"* [135]

[132] Moses Silinda quoted in Marrs. Ibid.
[133] "Vote 14 – Arts and Culture", *Estimates of National Expenditure 2003*, February 2003. Available from http://www.treasury.gov.za
[134] "Vote 20 – Sport and Recreation", *Estimates of National Expenditure 2003*, February 2003. Available from http://www.treasury.gov.za
[135] "Vote 14 – Arts and Culture" Pp. 272

The category also funds the South African Geographical Names Council, which is responsible for the naming and renaming of 57 000 places. In addition, forty million Rand has been allocated to each year's (2003/4 and 2004/05) Freedom Day celebrations.[136]

The money allocated to Arts, Culture and Language in Society is divided amongst artistic activities, and language initiatives.[137] A number of organisations, playhouses and production houses are now funded by the National Lottery, which is separate from the government.

The validity of these causes supported by the government is not being questioned here. They are no doubt essential tools for nation building, and help foster a sense of national unity and cohesion. These observations merely serve to highlight the fact that, considering the number of categories that fall under 'Arts and Culture', the amount of money that directly gets to the 'arts' is not significant, compared with the overall budgetary allocation.

Funding for the NFVF falls under the Cultural Development and International Relations category of the Arts and Culture budget. The document states that the target of the NFVF project at the time was to produce "5 new South African feature films per year."[138]

According to the 2000 PricewaterhouseCoopers report cited earlier, in 1999 the funding awarded to the NFVF implied "a funding ratio of 0.7%." That is, for every Rand spent on a production, R 0.07 would be available from the government.[139] However, the report also states that "some of the most successful countries have an average funding ratio of 19%".[140] Bear in mind that the

[136] Ibid. Pp. 283
[137] The 'language initiatives' also include the translation and printing of governments "comprehensive information" in all 11 official languages. The fund also provides for the publishing of other government documents in "at least six languages", as well as facilitating "spell checking in the indigenous languages"
[138] Ibid. Pp. 279
[139] PricewaterhouseCoopers (2000) Pp. 10
[140] Ibid. Pp.10

successful countries no doubt have more developed industries to start off with, so there is surely a greater need for more South African film funding. Even with the NFVF's current budget of R 21 million – about 25% of which goes to administration, and not direct funding – the ratio is only around the 1.5% mark.[141]

The NFVF has four areas of focus for funding. They are *Research and Development*, *Training and Bursaries*, *Distribution and Marketing* and *Production*. For the 2002/03 year, the NFVF spent the most money – R 6 609 769 – or 43.6% of the allocations on *Production*. R 6 320 339 (41.7%) went to *Distribution and Marketing*, whilst *Training and Bursaries* and *Research and Development* received R 1 555 121 (10.3%) and R 668 500 (4.4%) respectively. These figures support the evidence which shows that the amount of money spent on marketing and distribution needs to be proportional to the production budgets. The popular view amongst filmmakers is that marketing is just as important as production, but is something which is frequently overlooked in South African film production. The money that has been spent by the NFVF has helped greatly with local film development and promotion, and most recently the NFVF invested significant resources at the Cannes film festival. The amount of over four million Rand which was spent was questioned by government, but the investment has yielded very positive results;

> *"Story of an African Farm was sold to five territories, Max and Mona and Forgiveness, the first two films from DV8 project were accepted into international distribution in Europe … several confirmed co production deals with their counterparts."*[142]

All filmmakers interviewed stressed the importance of scriptwriting and script development. Currently *Research and Development* was also the lowest paid section out of the NFVF's grants, despite this being one of their main focus areas. A film starts with a script, and without a good script the film cannot be good, no matter how high the budget. More emphasis needs to be placed on scriptwriting

[141] This estimate doesn't include the additional R35 million feature film fund, which is spread out over three years. .

[142] "DAC's participation at the Cannes Film Festival", *Department of Arts & Culture*, 9 June 2004. Available URL: http://www.dac.gov.za/news/press_releases/2004_06_09.htm

in South Africa, and funds allocated to this sector could pay for better script reading, appraisal and editing.

The Industrial Development Corporation of South Africa (IDC) is also a major contributor to South African film-making. It was established in 1940 by an act of Parliament, but is "a self-financing, national development finance institution."[143] It focuses on contributing to economic growth, industrial development and economic empowerment through its financing activities. Its concerns are chiefly with the development of big business and industry. Its areas of focus include agriculture, mining, oil and gas, energy, tourism, information technology and telecommunications, transport infrastructure, transport services, health and education, and media and motion pictures. It appears to focus primarily on feature film production, and in 2003 it contributed R 126m to its *Media and Motion Pictures* category.[144] It has also helped with the funding of the Spirit Film Scholarship Fund along with the NFVF.[145] The unit has funded 16 feature films and 12 documentaries since its inception in 2001. There is no doubt that the corporation is assisting with development through its promotion of new film-making.

> *"One of the IDC's most recent investments was in Hotel Rwanda, a R170m production with backing from Italy, the UK and SA, which was filmed primarily in Alexandra and Soweto, creating 9000 jobs for the two weeks of filming, and almost 10000 over an eight-week period."*[146]

However, a few filmmakers expressed negative attitudes towards the IDC, saying it was very difficult – and in their cases impossible – to get funding. Richard Green approached the IDC for funding for *The Wooden Camera*, but the corporation apparently wasn't interested. Green said,

> *"They were approached twice and given the documentation they required but they did not even have the courtesy to acknowledge the project. And*

[143] *Industrial Development Corporation.* Available URL: http://www.idc.co.za/
[144] "Annual Financial Statements" Pp 7, ANNUAL FIN STATS.pdf, *Industrial Development Corporation.* Available URL: http://www.idc.co.za/
[145] http://www.nfvf.co.za/Training/LNS%20home.htm
[146] Ibid. Marrs.

> *did not even bother to answer any of our calls, from Paris or from Johannesburg. Thank goodness for the NFVF, who unashamedly have the interest of South African filmmakers at heart."*[147]

The IDC does seem to be principally concerned with the financial viability of the projects it supports. It is important to note that the IDC is primarily a financing – as opposed to funding – organisation. In 2001 the corporation's head of Media and Motion Pictures, Sam Bhembe, said that the IDC looks at a film's "commercial potential" when considering financing projects.[148] The IDC support projects up to 50% of the budget, typically in co-operation with a merchant bank, with a minimum investment of R 1 million.[149]

The National Lottery contributes to the Arts through The National Lottery Distribution Trust Fund (NLDTF). For the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002, R 99 313 412 was available for distribution to Arts, Culture and National Heritage. The category received only R 48 096 596, whereas Sport and Recreation, which was allocated the same amount, received R 70 661 538 despite having fewer applications for funding.

"National Heritage" included organisations that were involved with "cleanup operations, especially in densely populated areas, including "the planting of indigenous plants and trees and youth environmental education…"[150] The only apparent payouts directly related to film and television were;

Film Resource Unit	R 493 000
Film & TV Market Initiative	R 500 000
Maxi-D TV Productions	R 300 000
Tomas Films	R 697 535 [151]

[147] Andrew Worsdale, http://www.africafilmtv.com/pages/features/NF193wooden%20camera.htm
[148] Bhembe, S, quoted in "South Africa's Industrial Development Corporation Holds Briefing" *Africa Film and TV* Edition 143. 19 December 2001. Available from http://www.africafilmtv.com/pages/newsflash/2001/eng2001/nf57.htm
[149] Ibid.
[150] The National Lottery Distribution Trust Fund (NLDTF) Distribution List 1 April 2001 – 31 March 2002 Available from http://www.nlb.org.za/past.asp
[151] Ibid.

Once again, the arts' funding has been diluted with that of other initiatives. The 1998 DACST report, published before the National Lottery was established, stated that "it would appear that only 5% of the revenues will go to the arts."[152] Conversely, the above figures for the film and TV recipients in fact amount to 4.3% of the Arts, Culture and National Heritage allocation, or 0.89% of the total amount allocated by the Lottery.

Most recently the government, through the Department of Trade and Industry, has announced a new film subsidy, called the Large Budget Film and Television Production Rebate, worth R 252 million over a three-year period. Productions that spend R 25 million or more in South Africa will qualify for tax rebates; up to 15% for foreign productions, and up to 25% for local productions. The rebates ceiling is set at R 10 million per production. This scheme will definitely attract foreign companies and promote the local industry, at least in terms of the facilitation and technical industries, but not so much in terms of creative development. Minister Mandisi Mpahlwa said that the incentive "should lead to development of local content films with international appeal, thus ensuring sustainable film industry."[153] The PricewaterhouseCoopers report referred to earlier contained a model showing the benefits of supporting the film industry. It stated that an incentive of 15% of the value of the production results in an increase in output of 20%, or R 280 million. This increase in production would equate to an estimated 9 128 employment opportunities.[154] So "the South African public would reap the benefits of a healthy film industry on the levels of development, cultural reconstruction, progress and eventually prosperity for the country as a whole."[155] Whilst undoubtedly creating jobs and stimulating the industry, unfortunately the scheme would exclude new or marginalised filmmakers, as it is aimed at "projects with 'high end' production values"[156] and

[152] "The South African Film And Television Industry Report." Pp. 114.
[153] Mantu, R. "Incentive Scheme to Grow Film Industry", allAfrica.com, 30 June 2004. Available URL: http://allafrica.com/stories/200406300641.html
[154] PricewaterhouseCoopers (2000) "Film Industry Survey" . Pp. 14
[155] Botha, M. "The Song Remains the Same: the Struggle for a South African Audience 1960-2003", *Kinema*, Spring 2004. Available URL: http://www.kinema.uwaterloo.ca/botha041.htm
[156] Furness, J. "SA announces R250m film incentive scheme", *Policy and Law Online News*, 5 July 2004. Available URL: http://www.polity.org.za/pol/home/?show=52974#

clearly large budgets too. The Minister and the government seem to be falling into the trap of believing that money will solve the industry's problems. Films with large budgets or 'high production values' will not automatically have international appeal, nor will they be guaranteed box office success. It is not clear how attracting overseas companies and productions would directly stimulate local creative development. Whilst many technical staff and producers will benefit from increased local activity, the directors and scriptwriters will probably not benefit by receiving the same real work-environment experience.

Even a new short film initiative would be hard pressed to justify spending R 25 million on one set of short films. M-Net's *New Directions* program, as previously stated has cost about forty million Rand in the ten years of its existence. The Department of Trade and Industry has specifically stated on its website that training programmes are not eligible for the subsidy,[157] so funding another initiative of this sort with the rebate is not possible. The scheme does, however, include "support measures covering production cost, training and an internship programme, and export marketing support."[158] It has been stated that the skills-development component will focus on "short intensive courses over periods no longer than two weeks."[159] The details of the internship programme have were not available at the time of writing, but it will be interesting to see if the programme includes guidelines for using local scriptwriters or other creative employees, which would be critical for local development. At least fifty percent of the shooting has to take place in South Africa, but no guidelines or stipulations have been put in place regarding local content. South Africa could run the risk of being little more than a backdrop to large overseas productions. Most recently, there have been reports that the subsidy has not had the desired effect on local productions. Local companies are experiencing problems with the stipulation that the amount of R 25 million has to be spent within one year. Producers are expected to petition to have the time-frame adjusted to two years.

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[157] "The dti Launches new incentive for film industry" *The dti* 1 July 2004. Available URL: http://www.dti.gov.za/article/articleview.asp?current=1&arttypeid=1&artid=667
[158] Ibid.
[159] Ibid.

The above statistics and findings show that the funding to the arts, though fairly substantial, is distributed amongst numerous areas of focus. The amount of money in real terms that reaches the arts specifically is not relatively substantial after all. The recent move by the president to separate the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology can only be seen as positive for the arts. The sector needs to be taken seriously, and it is only once it is seen as a viable, valuable entity unto itself that real progress can be made. Furthermore, currently the film sector is just a subcategory of the arts, and needs to be targeted specifically in its own right.

The PricewaterhouseCoopers report on the film industry suggests that in order to achieve the 19% funding ratio figure, the government would need to provide funding of at least R 260 million *per annum*. The subsidy scheme will provide R 252 million over three years – and a significant proportion of this money is likely to go to foreign productions. According to the multiplier effect, the increased production will help associated industries – and the general economy – more than the film industry itself. It would appear from the above that the South African government is more interested in stimulating local industry in general, and not indigenous creative film-making.

Though co-productions are undoubtedly beneficial to the industry, they also split the rights of ownership of the product. The biggest stakeholder in any investment venture will always enjoy the biggest proportion of the profits. An example cited by the DACST report is the British film *The Full Monty*. It cost £ 2.1 million to make, and it was financed by Fox Searchlight in America. It still qualified for UK tax incentives despite the fact that most of the £ 214 million box office take went to the American company that financed it.[160] *The Wooden Camera* is going to be distributed locally, but the producers are planning on using independent distributors. It seems doubtful that the film will receive significant local support, nor does South Africa look to benefit much from its release. A case in point.

[160] "The South African Film And Television Industry Report." Pp. 38.

Due to the non-commercial nature of short films, development initiatives and most films made by independent filmmakers, they do not attract the attention of large financing groups such as the IDC, or the Department of Trade and Industry's recent film subsidy scheme. Whilst these are no doubt promoting the industry, they do not target or directly benefit development. In order to foster growth and new talent in the country, there needs to be more funding allocated to development initiatives. It has to be accepted that funding is not for the benefit of the industry, and not necessarily for the purposes of financial return.

As Botha states,

> *"If making profit is the only determining factor for the advancement of cinema, we would never had the remarkable aesthetic, social, technological and social developments in international cinema during the past hundred years."*[161]

"International experience shows that providing production money without assisting with the distribution and exhibition of products is not especially effective."[162] Merely throwing money at the issue will not solve any problems. Anant Singh said,

> *"We almost need a Marshall plan to get a new structure for our film industry. We've got into consultation fatigue so training has become a specific and tangible thing in order to build our industry."*[163]

Experience shows that institutional initiatives aimed at development are very successful. A significant number of emerging directors and scriptwriters in the country started out in initiatives like *New Directions* and *Dramatic Encounters*. Their worth as training exercises must not be marred by the generally low standard of films to come from them.

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[161] Ibid. Botha. (2004)
[162] "The South African Film And Television Industry Report." Pp. 109.
[163] Anant Singh, quoted in Worsdale A, "Cinematic notions on sale" *Electronic Mail&Guardian*, 13 November 1997. Available URL: http://www.chico.mweb.co.za/mg/art/reviews/97nov/13nov-filmmarket.html

Money needs to be earmarked for development to prevent it from only going to the few established film practitioners in the country. High profile, rigorous training initiatives that focus on development will raise the status of film-making and the arts in general in South Africa. At the same time they will also provide the training and development that South Africa's film-making industry needs.

Conclusion

Many respondents felt that the key to South Africa's film success lies in the ownership of the country's cultural diversity. The country's unique cultures are the only thing that separates South Africa from other nations. As Cape Town is experiencing with its facilitation industry, there is always another cheap location to use. South Africa has the infrastructure and relatively positive economic environment to support a growing film industry. The growth of a local film industry will also have many positive spin-offs for the local economy.

South Africa also has a very rich store of stories that are ready to be explored and put on the screen. The local industry cannot rely on overseas productions to create a stable and successful local market. What is needed first and foremost to maintain South Africa's rights of ownership and develop talent, is local support. Without local support the rights to local stories risk being lost to overseas companies.[164]

Since about one in seven films make a profit, organisations like the IDC need to fund seven projects in order to expect a return. One of the IDC's chief complaints has been that there simply aren't enough projects worth investing in. This appears to be true a problem across the board, as evidenced in development initiatives like *Dramatic Encounters*. I believe that most often films have been let down by poor scripts. To address the dearth of decent scripts, development needs to be targeted as much at scriptwriting as other film-making skills.

Using *Dramatic Encounters* as an example, there are other issues related to initiatives, apart from the quality of the end product. Initiatives are very costly, especially if they are coupled with intensive training courses. One of the reasons Alby James gave for the low standard of the *Dramatic Encounters* films was the

[164] The rights to Athol Fugard's *Boesman and Lena* were lost to an American company, and as a result the most recent film version was directed by, and starred Americans, despite being produced locally.

fact that, in his opinion, there was not enough intensive training. Due to budgetary constraints, he was forced to cut back on a number of important training modules. Apart from this, there was a time when the empowerment objectives were at odds with the need for quality productions. After lowering the entry requirements to admit a representative cross-section, they found that the participants needed more training than originally anticipated. The initiative was unable to accommodate this need in the end.

Apart from the quality issue, the IDC and the Department of Trade and Industry seem to hold the view that South African filmmakers are not taking full advantage of the funding mechanisms that are in place.[165] South Africa is unique in Southern Africa in having private corporate investment available for film-making. It appears that local filmmakers are not developing and pitching enough scripts for potential films. This needs to be remedied in order to increase the output of local films.

The short film is most certainly the most viable form for local development to take, as outlined in this research report. The short film affords the supporting of multiple, relatively cheap projects, and is a way of pairing established filmmakers with newcomers in a mentorship situation. The short film-making process also 'separates the wheat from the chaff' so to speak at an early stage, and ensures that valuable resources are going to those who deserve it. South Africa's resources are already stretched, and should not be wasted on subsidising bad film-making. The process may be slow, but with time the resources will go to talented filmmakers, and at the same time be developing formerly disadvantaged groups. This is surely the ultimate aim, and obviously a balance needs to be struck between supporting those disadvantaged groups as well as producing quality work which will benefit the industry as a whole.

[165] Steven Sack and Sam Bhembe. See "The dti Launches new incentive for film industry" *The dti* 1 July 2004. Available URL: http://www.dti.gov.za/article/articleview.asp?current=1&arttypeid=1&artid=667.

The importance of and emphasis on 'quality' cannot be overstated. In order to win popular support of local film-making, it is essential that films be well made. Investors will only start investing in local film when the films produced are of a certain standard, and able to win local support.

However, the poor quality of many of the initiatives' films must be considered in the light of the fact that the initiatives were first and foremost training initiatives aimed at new, inexperienced talent. The films must be viewed in terms of their roles as training vessels. Their main tasks were to provide opportunities for new filmmakers to get exposure and hone their skills. Though the films may not all be examples of cinematic excellence, the initiatives did live up to their training objectives. Indeed a number of the most notable short films that South Africa has produced have come out of those initiatives.

What is needed for growth in any creative industry, apart from institutional support, is a diverse range of voices, and a forum where artistic dialogue can be carried out. Only when this happens in the film industry will it grow and gain critical acclaim, and move towards the development of a National Cinema movement. Cultural diversity is an important factor not only in development, but in dialogue and conflict resolution too.

Film is an extremely powerful medium, and so is often the focus of political and ideological debate, particularly in a country where righting past wrongs is of paramount importance. A balance needs to be struck between promoting development effectively and creating quality films. The exposure of '*auteur*' filmmakers from formerly disadvantaged groups, such as Teboho Mahlatsi, Dumisane Phakathi and Zola Maseko proves that the initiatives do work, and are valuable enterprises.

The fact that all the above have been through film school of some sort shows that the initiatives are most effective when coupled with this formal training. High budget initiatives should be aimed at filmmakers with some prior experience or

training, such as film school. Smaller, less expensive initiatives need to be developed for people with no training or experience. *Dramatic Encounters* films fell short for this reason and Alby James felt that only formally trained individuals should be considered in future.[166] This re-affirms the fact that a proportional amount of funding needs to be earmarked for formal education. The NFVF has awarded no less than 73 bursaries, totalling over R 1, 5 million in the last year, primarily to students from formerly disadvantaged groups. This level of support is crucial in aiding development at a basic level. Without this, future investment in the film industry will not be as successful as it could be.

The local industry should theoretically be in a better position than Nigeria's, which has a thriving film industry despite lacking large television or cinema audiences. South Africa has the distribution infrastructure to support a local industry, but because of this distribution network, there is also a lot more competition from overseas products. Where other African countries lack the resources to compete, South Africa has a well developed film production infrastructure. Nigerian films have notoriously low production values, but they are made for the local market. The key lies not only in producing well-made films, but well written ones too, with local appeal.

The NFVF and FRU are good examples of the kind of support needed to develop local and international markets. More audience development needs to be carried out, both locally and abroad. The CIGS report states that the local market is "too small to support a film and television industry",[167] so new markets need to be developed in order for the sector to grow. Currently television and film production are worth around 7.7 billion Rand, or 77% of the local entertainment industry. In order to appeal to international markets, South African film-making needs to be brought up to speed, both in terms of scriptwriting and production. It will help develop a local film-going culture, which will in turn help with improving visual literacy – if this is in fact a problem.

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[166] Ibid.
[167] "The South African Film And Television Industry Report." Pp. 69.

There seems to be little disagreement that South Africa's film future lies in well-made feature films with both local and international appeal. For all the reasons mentioned above, the short film is not a viable, marketable or self-sustaining form of film production. There are not many truly talented filmmakers, and in an expensive and resource-hungry industry it is important to focus resources in the right place. The short film, as an invaluable training and development tool and wide-reaching instrument of artistic dialogue, is perfectly suited to meet these requirements. Currently short film-making is one of the most vibrant areas of creative film-making in the country, and could indeed be the stepping-stone for the industry as a whole, and not just the individual filmmaker. At the same time, short films will serve to promote social cohesion and the process of democratization and development that so urgently needs to take place.

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