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An Investigation Into Nationalism and National Allegory within South African Post-Apartheid Film

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Abstract

The aim of this research paper is to investigate the allegorical and national qualities present within South African post-apartheid cinema. Through the production of a satirical short film, an analysis of key texts by Frederic Jameson and Aijaz Ahmad, as well as a comparative breakdown of French and Australian national cinema, these topics will be explored and unpacked. The South African film environment establishes itself as one dominated by internationally produced films and one that utilises indigenous cultural aspects in order to compete against this dominance. This study identifies the specific techniques employed by South African filmmakers and highlights the successes and pitfalls of doing so. By examining the film careers of Darrell Roodt and producer Anant Singh, this paper identifies South African cinema as one with a focus on international goals, aspirations and audiences, while it neglects its own local audience and development. This research then proposes ways in which to resolve this problem by drawing on examples from other national cinemas.

Declaration

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

Christo Oberholzer
3rd day of November 2006

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SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

The South African film, and the climate that produces it, would appear to be enjoying a fair amount of success recently. The last two years have seen select films win Academy Awards (*Tsotsi*), receive Oscar nominations (*Yesterday*) and garner even more accolades and approval at international film festivals and screenings.

The timing and nature of this research paper – geared towards examining the perceived problems within South African film and the industry that produces it – may, for these reasons, strike some as strange or even offensive. There certainly does not seem to be anything wrong with our local film product, if it can win overseas awards such as the Oscar then it must be doing something right. To a certain extent I would agree, but upon closer inspection the 'successful' South African film is not as successful as it might first appear.

In my opinion, South African film fails in several areas because of the way it operates. Instead of promoting growth, it hinders further development through its production process and the subject matter that it utilizes in order to tell its stories. The contemporary South African film, while it appears to be a progressive and developing entity, is stuck in a particular pattern of production and storytelling that focuses its attention on specific elements within the South African environment and psyche. These traits, I do agree, have established and defined South African cinema in a successful manner but in order to maintain this 'success' the same process of manufacturing is continually repeated. This has resulted in a stale cinema that certain – in this case international - audiences find extremely appealing and which others – I would say local audiences - do not.

South African cinema, in the majority of cases, would appear to be obsessed with drawing attention to and repeatedly re-affirming that it is a national product of the country that produced it and that audiences must constantly be made aware of this fact. The dominant form of South African cinema would appear to operate in an allegorical manner that constantly

highlights issues and concerns that are or should be, according to the filmmakers who make these films, of national concern. Film of this kind appears to be utilized as a tool to promote awareness around key issues and facilitate discussion.

There is, of course, nothing wrong with this. Film is an important tool in promoting conversation but when its focus is repeatedly fixed and dominated by certain key aspects and it, as a result, undergoes extremely minimal development over the course of almost a decade and a half, then its purpose and production process deserves to be questioned.

It is my belief that South African cinema, regardless of the 'success' it would seem to be enjoying, is extremely limited in its scope and development. It is a national cinema enjoyed more by international audiences than its own indigenous audience.

In this essay I will investigate the allegorical nature of South African cinema in order to better identify the reasons why it operates the way it does and to raise possible solutions, if there are any, to the problems I have perceived.

This research paper will begin with an investigation into the term allegory - identifying how it has been used in the past and how it operates today - with these findings, in turn, being used to interrogate the validity of Frederic Jameson's claims that all third world texts are, and can only be, allegorical. My dissertation will then investigate how contemporary post-apartheid South African cinema functions, identifying the key problems and possible solutions, by examining specific theoretical texts and films.

I will conclude with a discussion around my dissertation film, *Robotic Dreams/National Nightmares*, which takes a cynical and satirical look at the local film industry in order to generate awareness around the perceived problems found within it.

ALLEGORY

> **Allegory**. An allegory is a narrative fiction in which the agents and actions, and sometimes the setting as well, are contrived to make coherent sense on the 'literal,' or primary, level of signification, and at the same time to signify a second, correlated order of agents, concepts, and events." (Abrams, *A Glossary Of Literary Terms*, 4)

Allegory is a device, much like metaphor, that is used to imbue a text or artwork with multiple meanings. It is often referred to as extended metaphor, and the author of a text or a specific work utilizes allegory when he or she wishes to communicate something more and other than just the literal meaning of that text.

Used by poets, authors, sculptors and painters for centuries its purpose was, and is, to communicate a moral or message to the viewer or reader of that artwork. This moral or message within the text is governed by influences outside of it.

> Simply put, an allegory is a fiction, almost invariably a story, which is designed, first and foremost, to illustrate a coherent doctrine which exists outside the fiction. Thus, the story and everything in it bear an immediate and point by point reference to a very specific aspect of the controlling doctrine which the fiction is illustrating. (Johnston, 1998)

Firstly, as a device allegory can be used to re-enforce and re-instill the values of an existing doctrine. In the past allegory was employed as a tool to show people how to conduct themselves and live their lives. These doctrines had strong associations with religion, moral views and judgements.

In John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* the trials of a burdened man, named Christian, and his travels from the "City of Destruction", his rescue from the "Slough of Despond" and his arrival at the "Celestial City" were used to illustrate to a reader in the 1600s how a Christian man ought to live.

Events and aspects from the text can be read in "point by point reference" to the teachings of Protestantism at the time, and in direct correlation to the Christian beliefs of today. "The City

of Destruction" is representative of the world, the "Slough of Despond" is the burden of sin that man carries, while Christian's rescue can be read as man's acknowledgement of that sin, and the arrival at the "Celestial City" is man's acceptance into Heaven. Character names such as Goodwill, Hypocrisy, Obstinate and numerous others also represent further trials, qualities and characteristics that man will encounter, or either have to acquire, in order to enter Heaven. In *Aesop's Fables* human qualities and characteristics are often, though not always, ascribed to animal characters. By this process of anthropomorphizing, these human qualities are stereotyped and become easily identifiable to a reader. A moral conclusion is then drawn and education received by the reader, as a result of the exploits of these various animal characters.

> In a sense they are not characters; they are not even character types; they are the personifications of very explicit characteristics introduced into the fiction in order to illustrate a clear point. (Johnston, 1998)

These fables are used to teach virtues such as patience (*The Goose that Laid the Golden Egg*), the consequences of lying (*The Boy Who Cried Wolf*) and the downfall of the greedy (*The Dog and the Bone*).

Texts such as *The Pilgrim's Progress* and *Aesop's Fables* extol the virtues of living a decent and virtuous life, hoping to instill such beliefs in their readers and listeners.

Secondly, allegory can be used to draw attention to and protest the shortcomings of an existing doctrine, and at the same time highlight a possible new doctrine or belief system that could replace the dominant one. This form of protest can also be identified in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. John Bunyan wrote this text while he was in prison for violating the Coventile Act of 1664. This law prohibited religious gatherings of more than five people outside the guidance of the Church of England. As a text it can be read as both a guide for his brand of Christian living, as well as a protest against the Church of England in the 1600s.

> Protestantism insisted that Christianity was essentially a matter of faith in Jesus Christ, a personal interaction between the Christian individual and God, without the necessary intervention of the Catholic Church as interpreter, guide, and, if necessary, coercive force. (Johnston, 1998)

More recent examples of allegory being used in a similar form of protest include Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*. This play, which is set during the Salem witch-hunts (1692-1693), is an allegory for the "witch hunts" that took place in 1950s America, during the era of McCarthyism, in the quest to eradicate Communism. George Orwell's novel *Animal Farm*, much in the same way that one of *Aesop's Fables* functions, has a yard of animals that are imbued with revolutionary thoughts and characteristics driving their human owners off the farm. Written during World War II the novel becomes a critique of Soviet Communism and totalitarianism.

Allegory functions as a tool of instruction and education by engaging actively with an audience or reader's mind through the use of figurative devices (animals with human qualities) and other metaphoric strategies - these are utilized to deliver a secondary meaning to the reader of a text, together with the literal or surface meaning. What is required from a reader of such texts is an active involvement in the interpretation of the text in order to access that secondary meaning.

The literal aspects of a text may contain information about the doctrine governing that text and, as a result, will provide a reader with the tools that he or she requires in order to discover the secondary meaning. An allegorical text, however, may also require a reader to be familiar with the concepts of a specific doctrine before such a text can be fully understood.

Allegory requires specificity to function adequately and this specificity is in turn governed by the doctrine outside of the text. Without it a text's figurative devices become symbols that can have a multiplicity of meanings and interpretations. While the meaning of allegory continues to be disputed within literary scholarship, "Allegories are always allegories of metaphor and, as such, they are always allegories of the impossibility of reading …" (de Man, 205), for the purposes of my argument I align myself with the opinion of Johnston, that:

> The major difference is that in allegories the reference point is clear and relatively unambiguous; whereas, with symbols the range of meaning is more ambiguous and uncertain. (Johnston, 1998)

Why use Allegory?

Allegory is used as an alternative to didactic discourse because of its elusive nature and the way in which it functions. It presents itself as entertaining and, as a result, is engaging to an audience or reader. The governing doctrine of a text is then allowed more freedom to influence an audience or reader and can be more effective in the act of persuasion because the meaning of the text has to be discovered. In order for allegory to work, the reader/viewer needs to embrace the major premise of the allegory, and this gesture of interpretive sympathy positions such a reader/viewer in a sympathetic relation to the text. The ostensible 'meaning' is not prescribed to a reader from the outset and he will hopefully receive it more openly because he is actively involved in the task.

> One should not assume the term to be either obvious or consistent in its usage either today or in the past. The term 'allegory' refers to different methods of interpretation and to different types of works and it has been defined by grammarians and applied by critics variously from one age to another. (Levis, 1993)

Allegory has been defined thus far in relation to its use as a literary device, but it is not confined only to the written word. Its use is influenced by factors such as the artist, what he wishes to communicate with the art form he has chosen and the dominant ideology that influences both him and his work. The dominant ideology acts independently of the artist and his actions or views. It is his role, through the art, to agree with, argue against or comment on prevailing doctrines in control. As such, allegory is a tool that has been, and can be, used in a variety of ways.

It is, however, important to understand – and for me to acknowledge at this point – that this use of allegory within various art forms only constitutes one facet of the numerous assumed and perceived roles that art undertakes.

> Whether art is to represent a composite of scattered beauties, generic humanity, average forms, and familiar appearances, or whether unique characteristics, undiscovered particularities, and ultraviolet discriminations—all these forms and qualities are conceived to be inherent in the constitution of the external world, and the work of art continues to be regarded as a kind of reflector, though a selective one. (Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, 41-42)

For the purposes of this essay it is important that art functions in relation to the specific conventions of allegory, but is in no way solely defined by these.

The modern form of allegory has shifted from its origins, where it used heightened figurative devices and metaphor to communicate its ideas, to an approach, in most cases, based in realism. Modern forms of entertainment such as film and television have established new, realistic modes of communication and the mass adoption of these has meant that allegory has had to evolve. The viewers/readers of these texts have adapted their reading practices accordingly, as well. The reference point or doctrine of an allegorical text can now be even more unambiguous, and even clearer, and easier to identify, but this again depends on the artist, author or filmmaker and what he wishes to communicate.

FREDERIC JAMESON

Contemporary ideas around the Third-world and National Allegory

Frederic Jameson is a critical and literary theorist who uses Marxism as the basis for his academic writing and thinking. Using this approach, he has identified allegory as a process that can be found in all third-world texts but one that is, strangely, absent from both the first and second world regions.

In his 1986 seminal text, *Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism*, Jameson states that:

> All third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call national allegories, even when their forms develop out of predominantly Western Machineries of representation, such as the novel. (Jameson, 67)

Dividing the World into Three According to Modes of Production

This definition of "All third-world texts" as being allegorical is based on the assumption that the world can be broken up into three parts based on their economic modes of production. Jameson follows Marxist orthodoxies in arguing that the world and its population can be divided into three well-defined groups based on the two main, competing forms of production found within it, namely capitalism and socialism.

The pursuit of capital is seen as the dominant form of production found throughout the world and is representative of nations and countries that have grown and developed as a result of the private and individual drive for profit. This movement is largely associated with the Western world (the dominant example being America) and occupies the first world classification used by Jameson.

Although early social movements (such as the Diggers in the seventeenth century) advocated various models of communitarian economic organization before the emergence of capital,

Socialism emerged as the dominant critique of private property under capitalism proper. Socialism is often characterized as the Second World and it acts as a critical defence against what its advocates perceive to be an unequal division of wealth as a result of capital. Emphasis is then placed on society as a collective and the means of production shifts from the individual to a public entity. Jameson's critical analysis (arising out of Marxist theory) utilises this ideological perspective.

Marxist Theory

The Marxist believes that capitalism is an economic system of production that functions in a two-fold manner. Firstly, the labour force - or proletariat - find themselves in a situation in which they have no free will, with them entering, "into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of," that will. (Marx, 11) Who they are is not decided by them but rather by their social situation. They have to work and are integral to this process of production. It is through them that the "economic structure of society" is defined. They establish a foundation or "base" upon which more can be built. (Eagleton, 4) They produce the surplus value which allows profit to be generated and accumulated by those who own the means of production.

In the Marxist model the "superstructure", the second part of the capitalist production model, exists as a result of this "base". Its function is to govern the foundation below it and to maintain and perpetuate the economic relationship between itself and the work force, "to legitimate the power of the social class which owns the means of economic production." (Eagleton, 4) The social class in charge maintains its position of power by using various ideologies or doctrines and in this way the capitalist mode of production is maintained.

This approach to capital represents the orthodox form of Marxism, one that utilizes a "methodological approach to the study of society, economics and history." Termed historical materialism it "looks for the causes of developments and changes in human societies in the way which humans collectively make the means to life, thus giving an emphasis through economic analysis, to everything that co-exists with the economic base of society (e.g. social

classes, political structures, ideologies)." (Historical materialism, Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia)

As a model of production it is limited by its focus on economics solely and for this reason has been criticized by various theorists since its inception. Criticism is directed at this theory because it is believed that this form of Marxism does not address the problems of the past or present – that a particular society or collective may be experiencing or has experienced – but instead focuses on an imagined future (Eric Hoffer), that the model employs a system which is closed off and, as a result, uses its own set of rules/conventions/ laws to interpret and explain anything that does not stand in agreement with it (Arthur Koestler). These two examples – that form part of a larger group - illustrate that Marxist ideology and its method of implementation is open to interpretation, depending on the individual or group using it.

The Third World

The Third World, however, according to Jameson lacks a mode of production and is simply defined as, "a range of other countries which have suffered the experience of colonialism and imperialism." (Jameson, 67) He does not specify which countries, but it appears from his text that he believes that capitalism and socialism are absent, not operating in this region, and that they pose a serious threat to the Third World - stating that, "One important distinction would seem to impose itself at the outset, namely that none of these [Third World] cultures can be conceived as anthropologically independent or autonomous, rather, they are all in various distinct ways locked in a life-and-death struggle with first-world cultural imperialism …" (Jameson, 68)

Jameson uses the term Third World - in line with its original definition - to describe those countries that have been part of colonialism, that are underdeveloped and are financially impoverished when compared with the dominant economic powerhouses of the world.

> The "Third World" is a vague term which, before the fall of the Soviet Union, was generally used to encompass all those countries outside of the developed capitalist and industrialised Stalinist countries. The term was first used in Claude Bourdet's, *L' Observateur* in an article by Alfred Sauvy published in August 1952, entitled *Trois mondes, Une planète*. (Three worlds, one planet):
>
> 'The Third World, ignored, exploited, and despised like the third state, wanting also to be something.'
>
> The term was introduced by analogy with the "third estate" of pre-Revolutionary France – the bourgeoisie, petit-bourgeoisie, artisans, peasants and workers – while the first two estates, were the clergy and the nobility. (Third World, Encyclopedia of Marxism)

The use of the term in this manner has been criticized for exactly the same reasons that Jameson raises against its use in his discussion.

Jameson acknowledges the fact that the use of the term "third world" is problematic, "it obliterates profound differences between a whole range of non-western countries and situations … between the traditions of the great eastern empires and those of the post-colonial African nation states …" but rather than examine these differences, he brushes them aside out of, what seems like fear of cluttering his neat three world division. He describes the term as being used in an "essentially descriptive sense." (Jameson, 67)

Allegory, according to Jameson, exists in the Third World region because it has no mode of production and, as a result, a split that should occur, and does occur in the first world, does not take place here. This split should take place between the public and private elements found within a text.

The activity of reading, for Jameson, is an endeavour which produces a private subject. In the Third World, however, there is an ideological and cultural resistance to such a move toward individualization. Thus such a reader is caught between private and collective consciousness.

The Private-Public Split

Jameson argues that the pursuit of capital in a first world country, such as America, causes a split to occur between the private and the public elements of a text, as well as in an individual reader, from that region. This form of reading occurs because the economic practice of capitalism causes the individual in the first world to separate from the larger collective. The personal and independent drive for capital causes the relationship between both to deteriorate and eventually separate so that any future connection between the two is read/interpreted incorrectly. This occurs when the reader of such texts can no longer read them in direct relation to his public-political environment. These elements are then, "recontained and psychologized or subjectivized," with the first world reader seemingly corrupted by his private pursuit for capital and now unable to think past himself. (Jameson, 71)

> Our numerous theoretical attempts to overcome this great split only reconfirm its existence and its shaping power over our individual and collective lives. We have been trained in a deep cultural conviction that the lived experience of our private existences is somehow incommensurable with the abstractions of economic science and political dynamics. (Jameson, 69)

The first world novel that wishes to make a political impact is no longer able to and becomes, "according to Stendhal's canonical formulation, a 'pistol shot in the middle of a concert." (Jameson, 69).

As for the second world? It is completely ignored by Jameson and no investigation is made into whether socialist ideology is affected by the same public-private split that separates the first world text from its public-political elements.

The third world text for Jameson, however, does have a public-political connection to the region from which it originated because the pursuit of capital does not exist there. Without this pursuit the individual's focus cannot shift from the collective to himself and the connection between the two is maintained, unlike the relationship found in the First World. There is an ideological and cultural resistance towards individualization.

> Third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic–-necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: *the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society*. (Jameson, 69)

Jameson's reasoning is that without an individual drive – or ideology – that produces a private self, there will be no texts produced within the third world that can engage with the private realm. For this reason texts from the third world can only be concerned with the public-political domain. There is no space for the private and the attention paid to the public-political turns these texts into allegories. Allegories, for Jameson, that focus on the national aspects of a region or country.

History of the Nation

The concept of nation, nationhood and nation-ness was born out of the need to replace certain old world models of control, mostly present before the 18th century. These models included what Benedict Anderson calls the religious community, the dynastic realm and apprehensions of time.

Religious Community

During the middle ages the proletariat of the time would have been governed by a system of religiosity that was conveyed and controlled through the use of a "sacred language and written script." (Anderson, 12-13) These sacred elements were believed to be supplied by a higher spiritual power or being, hence their sacredness, and in Europe this form of communication from above was largely delivered in Latin.

The language of Latin was responsible for maintaining the status of the church as a divine institution – it came from God – and one that its members could follow without questioning – you cannot question God. Unfortunately, as the world outside of Europe was discovered, along with new continents, peoples and languages, man's perception of his world and his way of life was challenged. This included the language of Latin.

> In a word, the fall of Latin exemplified a larger process in which the sacred communities integrated by old sacred languages were gradually fragmented, pluralized, and territorialized. (Anderson, 19)

Dynastic Realm

The kingship and sovereignty of dynasties were also challenged in the same fashion because they too functioned in relation to and were born as a result of the belief in a higher power.

> Kingship organizes everything around a high centre. Its legitimacy derives from divinity, not from populations, who, after all, are subjects, not citizens. (Anderson, 19)

With the fragmenting, pluralizing and territorializing of the followers of the church and subjects of the monarch these once strong collectives would have been shattered into groupings of unaffiliated individuals - individuals searching for an identity.

Apprehensions of Time

With this separation taking place between man and religion the concept of time, how it was perceived and how history was conceived also changed.

Time, and as a result history, did not exist before man began to question his position in the universe, "cosmology and history were indistinguishable, the origins of the world and of men essentially identical. Combined, these ideas rooted human lives firmly in the very nature of things, giving certain meaning to the everyday fatalities of existence (above all death, loss and servitude) and offering, in various ways, redemption from them." (Anderson, 36)

Benedict Anderson uses the term 'simultaneity' to describe this phenomenon. In biblical terms, prophesy and the fulfillment of that prophesy – no matter how many hundreds or thousands of years had passed – were perceived as functioning together simultaneously and, "in an instantaneous present." (Anderson, 24)

The breaking of the bonds between man and religion introduced the concept of time and, as a further development, history in the world of post-religion and the pre-nation. With the fracturing of man's former divinely inspired belief system he was now open to new doctrines, ways of thought and influences which could be used to define who he was and who he could become.

Language and Capitalism

The drive for capitalism and the development of print media alongside it, largely in the form of the newspaper, have been identified as the driving forces behind the concept of national consciousness.

> What, in a positive sense, made the new communities imaginable was a half-fortuitous, but explosive, interaction between a system of production and productive relations (capitalism), a technology of communications (print), and the fatality of human linguistic diversity. (Anderson, 42-43)

Through print media the imagined-community was realised because it united people through a set of standard, uniform, print vernaculars. People, "who might find it difficult or even impossible to understand one another in conversation, became capable of comprehending one another via print and paper." (Anderson, 44)

These print languages also secured these languages as permanent structures of a particular history and society because they were locked onto the page and now could not be lost or altered by individual interpretations. Their widespread use ensured that language, and those qualities specific to a group using that language, became part of a collective psyche. The spread of the newspaper medium and its delivery in large numbers also made people aware of how many other people - people like themselves - there were in the world.

These are the terms within which Anderson explains the emergence of Nation as an ideology and a locale.

Defining the Nation

Defining this term in more than just broad strokes, in relation to how it applies to specific groups or collectives of people and to how it functions, however, has proven extremely difficult to do.

> Nation, nationality, nationalism – all have proved notoriously difficult to define, let alone to analyse. In contrast to the immense influence that nationalism has exerted on the modern world, plausible theory about it is conspicuously meagre. (Anderson, 3)

The reason for this lies in the fact that the term nation exists and functions as an idea only. Benedict Anderson describes it as being "imagined" and as a concept it is just that. (Anderson, 5-6)

An individual of a collective or group will draw on particular qualities that will allow him to identify himself as being part of that group, and at the same time will use those qualities to differentiate himself from other groups. These qualities may include things such as ethnicity, language, religion, gender and numerous other cultural traits. The variety and scope of these defining characteristics is so broad, however, that the term nation cannot be determined in relation to anything concrete because the things which one nation may use to identify itself usually differ completely from those that another nation may use. Each nation distinguishes itself according to what it perceives to be of national importance.

> The social bases of nationhood have included culture and history in France, language in Germany, ethnicity in Japan, and religion in Pakistan and Israel. It is just not possible to define nationhood in terms of any one social or cultural criterion. (Birch, 6)

For the members of a particular nation their national characteristics – whether they be built on culture and history, language or religion – as noted earlier, allow them to identify with other members of the collective. The concept of the "imagined" community is defined largely by how these citizens interact and relate to each other.

> It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. (Anderson, 5-6)

A nation generates its strength in the minds of its individuals and is carried and sustained by how they perceive their lives to be in relation to each other. The nation functions as an idea or concept that is able to unite individuals under one descriptive banner, even when what it is describing may not actually exist.

The Reason/s for the Formation of a Nation

An awareness of how an individual identifies himself in relation to others like himself and in relation to others unlike, or different to, himself is the first process in the formation of a nation. However, in order for the process of nation making to be furthered, and in a sense fully realised, there must be a political element involved in its development.

> The pure theory of nationalism supposes the existence of nations before they acquire political expression, but in reality nations have to be created by a process which is at least partly political. (Birch, 7)

A nation developing a national consciousness does so because it is reacting to, or against, something. This reaction serves the function of drawing individuals together and uniting them, usually against a governing majority, or in response to the threat of a loss of identity.

> The specific versions of nationalism take two slightly different forms, of which one is 'the Ruritanian people ought to be united under a single Ruritanian government' and the other is 'the Ruritanian people ought to be liberated from foreign domination so that they can govern themselves'. (Birch, 4)

The National Allegory

"All third-world texts," according to Jameson, "are to be read as what [he calls] national *allegories*, even … when their forms develop out of predominantly Western Machineries of representation, such as the novel." (Jameson, 69)

Allegory, as it has been established, is linked to the third world text because the Third World lacks a mode of production, specifically capitalism, and as a further result no split can take place between the text's private-public elements. With no break, texts are only concerned with the public-political.

The third world text at this stage can be read as allegory but in order for it to become a national allegory, as defined by Jameson, there must be a guiding doctrine that exists outside of it. That 'thing' that a collective can lash out against and react to. That doctrine is, "the experience of colonialism and imperialism." (Jameson, 67) Allegory in the Third World becomes national allegory in response to this.

Jameson defines the third world situation as being "*embattled*" and his description of the region in this way implies that imperial and colonial powers - and their influence - are still active within this part of the world, even though the majority of colonial countries had gained their independence by the 1960s.

Jameson, of course, is aware of this fact because he refers to colonialism as being active within the past, as an experience, and one that we can assume is now part of history. So, why does this specific history still influence the contemporary third world and, as a result, the way this region functions and is perceived? Again, it would seem that he will not allow anything to clutter or disrupt the neat three-world model he has proposed.

Allegory in the third world is forced to exist in a continual spirit of protest and the only way to combat the effects of colonial ideology is to resist them by asserting difference through national means. As Birch elaborates, "'[T]he Ruritanian people [must be] liberated from foreign domination so that they can govern themselves'." (Birch, 4) The people of the Third World in an attempt to protect their collective identity employ techniques of national identification in order to unite against the colonialism that seeks to separate them. This form of community is imagined and, in turn, gives rise to an imagined or Ruritanian people.

Colonialism and Imperialism – Past and Present

The effect that colonial and imperial control had on those countries it dominated cannot be denied, but is it feasible to believe that this form of control is still able to shape the way the third world region defines and views itself?

Jameson would have us believe yes, and it is only through a closer analysis of the terms 'colonialism' and 'imperialism' that it becomes apparent that both function in different ways and that one is certainly not confined to any specific history.

Jameson's use of the word colonialism seems to be consistent with the definition that has been used in the past, referring to events in which a sovereign state extended its power to other parts of the world, but when it comes to the use of the second word responsible for influencing the development of the third world, imperialism, that word is used both in a historical sense and is removed from history at the same time. For Jameson imperialism is now also a contemporary issue that has influence in a cultural realm, having more to do with the colonization of minds than with land or geographic regions.

Through cultural exportation the first world (America being the prime example) is able to export itself to the rest of the world through various means and products – film, television, the internet, magazines – and along with them the influence that is associated with these forms of representation, the dream of living 'that' life including capitalism, find their way to third world countries.

Capital, it appears, is present in the Third World after all, but is not adopted as an economic mode of production because the third world is, according to Jameson, "in various distinct ways locked in a life-and-death struggle with first-world cultural imperialism." (Jameson, 68) Capital will destroy the third world, if given the chance.

Jameson would like us to believe that the Third World and its inhabitants want nothing to do with capitalism, but he does not give specific reasons or elaborate on why there is a reluctance to embrace what the First World has to offer. He simply states it as fact before moving on.

Conclusion

By defining all texts from the third world as allegorical Frederic Jameson provides his readers with a model to define the world. It relies heavily on economic modes of production to do this, but through it he is able to group the world into first, second and third world divisions in relation to the mode of production each adopts, or does not.

The First World is associated with capital, the Second with socialism – which is largely neglected in his analysis – and the Third World is defined, not by capital or socialism but, through its association with colonialism.

Without a valid mode of production the third world texts that originate from this region are linked indefinitely to that region. A text from the third world is, and can only be, about the third world and its public-political elements because without the pursuit of capital, a private pursuit, there can be no distance or split between the third world text and these elements. The third world text, therefore, becomes an allegory of the region from which it originated.

Defining the Third World in relation to colonialism also turns these allegories into national allegories because the third world population is only allowed to identify itself in relation to a system of oppression. No other options or ways of defining themselves exist and, therefore, all third world texts can, and have to, be read as national allegories.
Jameson's theory is extremely neat and uncomplicated in terms of defining the world and it is exactly for these reasons that it has drawn the attention of, and been attacked, by other theorists.

AIJAZ AHMAD

Problems with Jameson's Theory

Aijaz Ahmad is a Marxist theorist, born in India, who seems to take great offence at the ease with which Frederic Jameson classifies the world, and in so doing, the Third World. Being part of the supposed third world himself he slams Jameson for the way in which he eradicates the defining characteristics that are used to distinguish, and separate, one country or region from another through his definition of "All third-world texts" being allegorical. (Jameson, 67)

> I shall argue, therefore, that there is no such thing as a "third-world literature" which can be constructed as an internally coherent object of theoretical knowledge. There are fundamental issues – of periodisation, social and linguistic formations, political and ideological struggles within the field of literary production, and so on – which simply cannot be resolved at this level of generality without an altogether positivist reductionism. (Ahmad, 4)

The World Cannot be Defined by Modes of Production Alone

Ahmad highlights the fact that Jameson's definition is flawed because it is based exclusively on modes of production and the fact that Jameson writes as if none are evident in the third world region. By using his country of birth as an example Ahmad shows that the location of India, a supposed third world country, is not exclusively maintained in Jameson's third world definition but, rather, incorporates elements from both the first and third worlds and functions in both simultaneously.

India was a colonial province of the British and, therefore, according to Jameson's reasoning it should want to resist the pursuit of capital outright. Ahmad disproves this by listing the capitalist characteristics found within India such as, "generalised commodity production, vigorous and escalating exchanges …technical personnel more numerous than that of France and Germany combined, and a gross industrial product twice as large as that of Britain." (Ahmad, 7)

Citing the countries of the pacific rim as a further example, "from South Korea to Singapore, [and that they] constitute the fastest growing region within global capitalism," Ahmad questions whether other supposed third world countries such as Brazil, Mexico and South Africa, to name but a few, lie within the first or third world?

Allegory In The Third World Is Only Concerned With The National

Ahmad also draws attention to the apparent lack of a mode of production in Jameson's hypothesis as locking allegory into a one-to-one relationship with the term nation.

> For, if societies here are defined not by relations of production but by relations of intra-national domination; if they are forever suspended outside the sphere of conflict between capitalism (first world) and socialism (second world); if the motivating force for history here is neither class formation and class struggle nor the multiplicities of intersecting conflicts based upon class, gender, nation, race, region and so on, but the unitary "experience" of national oppression (if one is merely the *object* of, the Hegelian slave) then what else *can* one narrate but that national oppression? (Ahmad, 9)

Hegel and History

Through the term the 'Hegelian slave', Ahmad makes reference to the German philosopher Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, his metaphysical approach to history and the development of societies within history. For Hegel, the individuals that make up a society are pre-conditioned and, as a result, presuppose certain things concerning the world they inhabit and the way in which it functions. These ways of perceiving the world are not standardised across all societies but are unique to each one. Different presuppositions separate one society from another. Hegel's reading of the relativism of cultural contexts is explained in the following terms:

> A civilisation whose conceptual presuppositions are not explicit, but are embedded in myth and poetry will be different from one which has articulated its categories in a rational form in philosophy or science. Similarly, a civilisation which sees the heavens and human society as peopled by free individuals will be different from one which conceives of the world as governed by an all-powerful natural or divine necessity. (Houlgate, 10)

The consciousness of an individual, and as a result a society, is determined by this system of how we view ourselves and the world we inhabit, a system which Hegel calls, 'Metaphysics'. (Houlgate, 6)

> Every form of human consciousness thus has its metaphysics, 'its instinctive way of thinking, the absolute power within us, which we only master if we make it the object of our knowledge'. (Houlgate, 6)

The world we live in, in turn, is defined by this consciousness by giving meaning and shape to it rather than just being used to make sense of it. We define it. By making 'it the object of our knowledge,' we may begin to develop a new consciousness by placing our previous consciousness behind us or, in the past.

> History is thus the process whereby human beings come to new levels of awareness of their freedom, of their productive, active nature, and thereby produce new forms of social and political life. The human activity of self-production is, therefore, at the same time the process of self-discovery and self-revelation – a fusion of making oneself and finding oneself, of acting and of coming to know, which is perhaps best expressed in English by the word 'self-realisation'. (Houlgate, 27-28)

A society and its consciousness - according to Hegel - can only develop and be defined according to this realisation of itself and of its history. This theory operates in a structured fashion that places various cultures and societies in various stages of cultural development. Certain cultures are, therefore, more advanced when compared with others and, as a result, function at a higher level of consciousness.

Rather than adopt a universal approach, as put forward by the philosopher Kant (Houlgate, 8), in which the individual human element is excluded and all societies are observed as functioning in exactly the same fashion (a structural approach), Hegel believes that only certain elements are universal.

> Certain categories – being, for example – may well be universal; but others, such as cause and effect, or force and expression, are to be found, according to him, only in more advanced cultures. Furthermore, all concepts – those which are universal and those which are not – are conceived and understood by different ages and civilisations in different ways. The categories of thought are not fixed, eternal forms which remain unchanged throughout history, but are rather concepts which alter their meaning in history. (Houlgate, 8-9)

Hegel's theory can be viewed as a system that is both limiting and one that provides the opportunity for development but, again, this depends on the culture or society being analysed.

Hegel and Jameson

It would seem that according to Ahmad, Jameson is a slave to Hegel and his theory because he does not adopt a universal approach to the third world and views it, as Hegel does certain regions, in a limited state of cultural development. The third world is locked in by one dominant cultural presupposition (that it lacks a mode of production) and into a singular collective (national) consciousness, trapping it.

I would argue, however, that this is no fault of Hegel's but rather of Jameson's. He has failed to look at third world countries individually, adopting a structuralist approach to his analysis while Hegel clearly uses a humanist approach. To examine each country from the third world individually would discredit Jameson, as pointed out by Ahmad's example of India.

The orthodox approach that Jameson utilises does not include or account for factors outside the economic scope of his analysis and also puts him at odds with the founding fathers of Marxism, Marx and Engels, both of whom adopted Hegel's approach to history in the development of their writings on capital. Both believed in – and added to Hegel's research - a collective materialist approach, encompassing all aspects when it comes to an analysis of how a society or culture functions.

> [I]t was from Hegel that they knew how important it was to give voice to the object. Intellectually unmastered history amounts, in their words, to a "collection of dead facts." By contrast, the historian working within a materialist framework must be intent on grasping the object, that is, on representing it in "its totality. (Schmidt, 11)

Engels and Marx believed that history and nature are both part of and function together in the same world, they cannot be separated; history and its events cannot be determined according to a set of pre-determined rules; and that a total universal approach to and classification of history is not feasible because history must go through a process of development. "'World history has not always existed; history as world history is a result.'" (Schmidt, 15)

Jameson's theoretical approach is more in line with the structuralist Marxist Althusser, who "'naturalizes' the concept of ideology by suggesting that it is a functional mystification of any social order.[40] Rather than confronting the dilemma of truth and ideology, … [he] replaces it with 'the simple fiat of science.' (Houlgate, xix) Jameson totalizes his view of the Third World.

No capitalist mode of production means no public-private split, which means no development within the third world region, no knowledge of anything other than itself – as a national product - and, as a further result, no history.

> And it is perhaps that other idea—namely that "preindustrialized … culture knows no history; each generation repeats the same experience" –which is at the root of now suspending the so-called third world outside the modern modes of production (capitalism and socialism), encapsulating the experience of this third world in the Hegelian metaphor of the master/slave relation, and postulating a unitary form of narrativity (the national allegory) in which the "experience" of this third world is to be told. (Ahmad, 14)

For Ahmad the world functions in a form of interconnectedness that cannot be ignored by defining it in relation to capitalism or any other mode of production alone. There are other factors that need to be taken into account.

> [T]he point is that the binary opposition which Jameson constructs between a capitalist first world and a presumably pre- or non-capitalist third world is empirically ungrounded. (Ahmad, 7)

Which National?

Jameson continually refers to 'nation' and the 'national' but never defines either of these terms in a concrete manner; nothing specific is linked to them. Rather, they seem to be used loosely as blanket terms which can cover a wide range of meanings and associations. Ahmad questions their use and the, "emphatic insistence on the category 'nation' itself [because it] keeps slipping into a much wider, far less demarcated vocabulary of 'culture,' 'society,' 'collectivity' and so on." (Ahmad, 14)

By highlighting the fact that the term 'nation' is an extremely broad one, one that is layered with further associations, Ahmad questions what nation Jameson is referring to. As pointed out already, the term 'nation' functions as an idea or concept, but it is still a term that requires specificity in order to function. Specifics are what separate one nation from another.

Jameson's three world division splits the world into three economic regions or continents, and it would seem these economic modes of production are specific enough for him, but it fails to break each of these down into smaller – national – components. A broad, all-encompassing theory is adopted instead of smaller specific theories geared towards the national characteristics of each country found within the third world. Those characteristics which make them unique in relation to each other. Through Jameson's definition, however, each country in the third world is driven and defined by the same lack of capital.

The Canon

The selection of literary work that Jameson refers to when speaking about "all" third world texts is also another area of concern for Ahmad. He draws attention to the fact that what Jameson refers to as "all" is merely a selection of texts that have had the fortune of being translated into English, forming a tiny selection of work from the Third World.

> Since the vast majority of literary texts produced in Asia, Africa and Latin America are simply not available in English, their exclusion from the US/British "canon" is self-evident. If, however, one considers the kind of texts Jameson seems to have in mind, one begins to wonder just what mechanisms of canonization there *are* from which this body of work is so entirely excluded. (Ahmad, 15)

Jameson's analysis is again limited by focusing on certain aspects and excluding others – in this case numerous indigenous texts which have not been translated.

Conclusion

Ahmad, through his examples and discussions involving his native India, highlights that Jameson's obsession with the term 'nation' is unrealistic and extremely limited. It fails to acknowledge that the regions and countries within the third world are affected by a myriad of other influences and factors (individualizing them), that capital - as a mode of production - is present in these regions and that the experience of colonialism and imperialism is not just experienced in the third world alone.

In order to combat this narrow approach Ahmad suggests that:

> If we replace the idea of nation with that larger, less restricting idea of collectivity, and if we start thinking of the process of allegorisation not in nationalistic terms but simply as a relation between private and public, personal and communal, then it also becomes possible to see that allegorisation is by no means specific to the so-called third world. (Ahmad, 15)

In this way, the third world can be analysed in relation to individual traits particular to each nation and not as a singular mass defined in a universal fashion – in this case, according to economic modes of production - and in which individual factors are ignored.

An analysis in this manner, in turn, places the third world on par with both the first and second worlds and allegory becomes something that can be applied to a range of categories and not just the national.

My Opinion

As an individual living in South Africa, a supposed third world country, I agree with those concerns raised by Ahmad in response to Jameson's theory.

However, South Africa certainly can be defined by certain characteristics, and has elements that are well described within Jameson's terms. These cannot be ignored.

We have a history saturated with a rich tradition of colonialism (settlers from Holland, France, Germany and England); problems that run parallel to other third world nations (the AIDS pandemic); and an assumed sense of poverty and third worldliness generated by the fact that we are found on the poorest continent in the world. This assessment is held by people looking into the country/continent, rather than those living within it and looking out.

South Africa could easily satisfy those requirements put forward by Jameson in order to become a third world country that produces texts only concerned with national allegory. Fortunately, as Ahmad pointed out, Jameson's theory fails to take into account numerous other factors that help to define South Africa as something else completely. South African nationalism is informed by more factors than those which Jameson assigns to the 'third world.'

Nationalism in South Africa

Capital

Again, Jameson's definition of the Third World, and of South Africa indirectly, falls flat when it comes to the issue of capital, as it did with Ahmad's example of India. South Africa is a country that may have experienced colonialism, but is one that is not defined by that experience alone or is devoid of any economic mode of production. South Africa is largely a capitalist country.

> South Africa is a middle-income country with an abundant supply of resources, well-developed financial, legal, communications, energy, and transport sectors, a stock exchange (the JSE Securities Exchange), that ranks among the 10 largest in the world, and a modern infrastructure supporting an efficient distribution of goods to major urban centres throughout the region. South Africa's per capita GDP, corrected for purchasing power parity, positions the country as one of the 50 wealthiest in the world. (South Africa, Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia)

This relationship with capital shatters the fixed link between the private individual and public elements found within the South African context. Allegory is therefore, (according to Ahmad's response to Jameson) allowed to exist in more forms than just the national-allegorical relationship that is put forward by Jameson.

However, as much as I agree with Ahmad's comments concerning Jameson's theory, that as an economic model it simply does not work, I also feel that Jameson's ideas and theory when applied to another area of the South African landscape may classify and categorize that area almost perfectly. The terms nation and allegory do indeed seem to be intertwined within the makeup and the characteristics of the South African film industry.

THE SOUTH AFRICAN FILM INDUSTRY

> Going to see South African cinema is at the moment a patriotic duty rather than what it should be—entertainment, fun, exciting.
>
> Bata Passchier, film teacher (Saks, 144)

With the majority of, but not all, films that are produced within South Africa, there seems to be an identifiable trend in which concepts and ideas particular to the South African nation are employed in the making and marketing of those films. The result: South African film, in most cases, functions as an allegory of the nation.

If one is to glance casually at the films that have been produced over the last twelve years, since South Africa became a democracy, a strong political and social presence in those films cannot be denied. South African film would seem to be largely linked to events that have shaped and are shaping the country and its people.

I realise that this hypothesis is almost as sweeping as Jameson's. I, unlike Jameson however, admit that not all films that are produced are allegorical, but I would argue that the majority are geared towards a specific audience and that they contain elements that are steeped in a South African national flavour. In order to unpack this comment effectively the current national climate in South Africa must first be understood, before moving on.

The Nation of South Africa

Trying to define the nation of South Africa as a single entity, classified under one descriptive banner, is no easy task. As a country, South Africa has eleven official languages and a multitude of different cultural and ethnic groups which can be found within its borders. The question then becomes: What and whose national are we investigating?

For an analysis of the South African film industry, the scope of such an investigation will become too broad, if it tries to accommodate all these factors, and the end result will be one that yields a series of smaller nationalisms instead of a single one that can contain and define all those within it, as a nation collectively producing a national cinema. For this reason, it is important to reduce the categories that can be used to define these nations and find those characteristics that may be specific to all South Africans, as a people.

I realise this approach may contradict what has been said earlier concerning specificity and the role it plays in defining a nation, that specificity separates one nation from another and is required to group people with similar traits together. This approach, however, will not remove specificity. It will merely combine the smaller national groups together and try to identify traits specific to them as a whole. Emphasis will then shift from traits such as ethnicity, culture and religion and focus on the country and its inhabitants collectively - what defines them as a people and separates them from other nations (countries).

Political affiliation and identification may present itself as a means of achieving this - the African National Congress's goal is to unite the nation under President Thabo Mbeki - but joining a political party is dependant on what people believe. The number of political organizations that run in opposition to the ANC each election is testament to the fact that people have different and varying beliefs. As a result, classification via political association will be too diverse to group South Africa's inhabitants together collectively.

Broader categories that retain specificity; such as language, location and history, however, may be able to group and define the nation of South Africa.

Language

The nation of France is one example in which language is used to group a collective of people. The French language is - for the French people - a national priority and a source of great pride that is often defended vehemently against, what are perceived to be, attacks against the nation

of France from the influence of other languages (English being the main one) and as a result, other (non-French) ways of life.

> Recently [French President Jacques Chirac] attended a multination conference on economic issues at Brussels, and was outraged when a French businessman delivered an address in English, saying without apology that "English is the language of economics." Chirac stalked out of the session in high dudgeon, saying it was unthinkable for a Frenchman to desert his native tongue in such a fashion. (Wild, Rutland Herald)

The French language is used to promote French-ness and establish an identity amongst the inhabitants of France. However, as much as the French would like, and even with the French language being the only official language, it is not the only language found within the country's borders. Regional languages - such as Alsatian, Basque and Flemish – and languages spoken by the immigrant population – such as Portuguese, Arabic and German – again reveal smaller nationalisms within a larger one. French may be able to group a large majority of people together but it cannot, universally, bring every individual found within France together.

Also, the French language is not confined to the country of France alone, with it being one of the official languages of Canada. This again highlights the fact that language alone may not be specific enough to separate one group/collective (the French) from another (the French Canadians).

With eleven official languages, language as a category in the South African context becomes too divisive and the specificity needed to draw all individuals and groups together is lost.

Location

Location alone could certainly be used to define a nation. It says, "We are here and you are there, our living space is unique not only in geographical positioning, but also in terms of features and national resources." (quotes are my own) But, this again broadens the area of focus and may open it to other nationalisms.

South Africa is broken up into nine official provinces, each with their own unique characteristics, ethnic groups and languages. In South Africa, Capetonians take great pride in proclaiming the beauty of Table Mountain, while people from Johannesburg take as much pride in the Highveld thunderstorms that occur during summer. Which of these should, or could, be included in defining South Africa as a nation? Again, the defining factor is broadened to include others.

History

As a category, history would appear to be the most suitable way of defining a nation and specifically the nation of South Africa. The term history is able to incorporate all categories of classification – such as ethnicity, culture, language and religious belief – and any smaller or sub-categories, that may originate from these larger ones, when referring specifically to the history of the conception of a particular nation.

The history of a nation includes all categories and individuals because all nations are, initially, defined in relation to and born out of a particular past that groups them together. The past and its experiences act as an imagined point of community and recognition. Hegel's views of moving from one consciousness (becoming aware of oneself) into another developed consciousness run parallel to this line of thought.

History is able to unite all individuals from a particular country/nation because its only requirement is that its occupants must acknowledge, share or identify with a particular period in time before the new consciousness was formed. Identification by the individual with this particular past is essential to this process.

I realise that Hegel's theory on the formation of consciousness is not limited only to a single and isolated development but numerous developments, depending on the experiences of the nation being studied, and for this reason my focus will be on the first birth (if you will) of the nation and the moments leading up to it (the conception) because these, in most cases, are moments which radically define and establish a new nation.

Secondary and tertiary developments, while still important, would seem to modify a particular consciousness within the framework of the new nation rather than change that framework. In most cases, the development in these instances is not as monumental or influential as the first.

Both the nations of France and America were born out of protest and violent struggle against a ruling class, in these cases the monarchs in charge of each, but with the defeat of these (the British in America, and the French at the hands of their peasant class) new modes of governance were installed that have been maintained ever since.

The histories of these nations, of course, are not defined solely by these single events – the American Civil War would take place almost 80 years after the American War of Independence – but they are described as the defining moments of each. They are responsible for developing and defining the nations we know today and acknowledge a change in the collective consciousness of their citizens at the time.

Whatever the subsequent changes in collective consciousness that have taken place since then, they have not been on the scale or magnitude of these first births. They have not changed the nation as we know it or established a new nation. The American federal government, which was established at the time of America's independence, has remained in place since the late 1700s. Changes within the smaller nationalisms found within this larger American framework, however, are numerous (the American Civil Rights movement is one example), but have not influenced a radical or revolutionary change in the larger governing nationalism.

SOUTH AFRICA'S HISTORY

> How, then, shall we begin to talk about cinema in national terms—that is, the way in which the concept contains the potential for encapsulating or carrying the aspirations of the emerging nation? I can think of only two forms that have managed to date to incorporate diversity in a way that reflects a South African national consciousness. One is the foundational document of state and civil society, the Constitution of 1996. The other is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a body created to examine gross violations of human rights from 1960 to 1994. Both are about diversity. (Saks, 152)

The above quote from Lucia Saks speaks about how South African national cinema ought to be defined by acknowledging the diversity of South Africa's inhabitants. This diversity must be included as one of the main features that define who we are as a nation and that can certainly be embodied in the 1996 Constitution and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Unfortunately, the current trend within South African cinema – rather than adopting a diverse strategy – would seem to be to adopt an approach that is linked to a history that precedes both these events and that, ultimately, is the starting point for grouping South Africa and its citizens collectively as South Africans. As a result, the development and scope of our film culture is confined to one area of focus.

Apartheid

Apartheid, a system of racial segregation introduced by the ruling National Party (NP) in 1948, was responsible for gross human rights violations, violence and the oppression of select racial groups (black, coloured and Indian populations) at the hands of the white (European) minority.

For forty-three years (1948 –1991) the National Party maintained order throughout the country with stringent laws (by employing a pass book system that all black inhabitants had to adhere to) and by allocating specific areas (or homelands) for the black population to live in (The Group Areas Act of 1951). Movement outside these areas was only considered acceptable so that these groups could find work in surrounding urban centres and in this way the apartheid

government benefited by being able to extract cheap labour from a vast pool of service workers.

Apartheid represents the period of history in which South Africa and its inhabitants were defined as a series of smaller nations governed by a ruling white nation. This particular way of defining and grouping individuals – according to race and skin colour – was, naturally, contested by other versions of nationhood such as the African National Congress's equal-rights-for-all approach, but despite numerous efforts (both peaceful and violent) apartheid maintained its position as the dominant form of nationhood for decades. It may have functioned by separating (discriminating or privileging) according to skin colour and race, but it excluded no one in its scope.

Apartheid continues to define those citizens (particularly the new generation) who were not directly influenced or aware of it because it has been canonized (in books, the media and film) and solidified as the ideology from which South Africa's current democracy was born. It represents the history of the nation before its birth - what we were – and leads into the growth of the new nation - what we have become. From apartheid a new collective – democratic – consciousness developed.

The new nation got its start by defining itself in relation to apartheid, as something opposed to it, and this represented a radical change in the collective consciousness of the South African people. This was a monumental change that avoided the bloodshed and revolutionary actions of both the American and French movements for independence. Many regard it as a miracle.

Post-Apartheid

Over the past twelve years of democracy, apartheid history has continued to be a prominent feature in defining South Africa, and it will continue to do so, but the focus on a large, all encompassing national consciousness – defined in relation to a specific past – has shifted somewhat to smaller, internal nationalisms and concerns found within these. Focus has moved

to celebrating the individual diversity and characteristics of South Africa's people and cultures. Celebrating what makes each of us unique.

These changes would appear to mirror the points raised by Lucia Saks concerning South African film, but these have not been widely adopted by our films or filmmakers. South African cinema would appear to be locked into one consciousness, unable or unwilling to evolve.

SECTION 2

PROLOGUE

In her essay entitled, "The Race for Representation: New Viewsites for Change in South African Cinema," Lucia Saks provides a thorough analysis of the emerging South African film industry and identifies the key aspects in which it began to re-establish itself, both locally and abroad. Amongst the various issues raised – ranging from the formation of organizations such as the National Film and Video Fund (NFVF) to how a national cinema ought to operate - she acknowledges the difficulties that filmmakers face in the South African climate and draws specific attention to the roles of film as art, or as a means of securing capital. Her analysis is sweeping and covers a wide range of factors in order to analyse how South African film functions across numerous fields.

The reason I raise this point is to limit the scope of my analysis from the outset of this second section. I do realise that there are many factors that need to be taken into consideration in order to understand national film and its workings, but for the purpose of this essay I will only focus on certain key elements. Elements that I believe can be separated from the voluminous analysis that national cinema often requires.

In this second section I would like to separate the logistical aspects (factors such as film distribution, availability and access to cinemas) as much as possible from the South African film equation and focus on the critical aspects and perceptions of South African film.

Within the arena of South African film production, logistics do play an important part in influencing the development of the industry and the influence it has over its intended audience. A constant complaint is that certain previously disadvantaged areas, such as townships, do not have the facilities to support an emerging film market. South African film development is, therefore, hindered because it is confined to those areas it has always been concentrated in and no further growth can be achieved as a result.

These are valid concerns and do prevent development but, in my opinion, a greater concern is audience perception and the reaction to local films and products. Without the desire to see a new film, even if the facilities are available, that film will not reach an audience. I believe that the current model upon which the majority of the South African industry bases its practices is flawed and outdated because it largely ignores the local audience.

In the following section my analysis will focus on South African film's obsession/dependence on apartheid stories, Lucia Saks' theme of 'subsidy and self' (art versus capital) and the flawed model upon which most of our industry functions. I will also track the development of South African cinema in the post-Apartheid era by examining three films that I believe highlight both the problems and the successes of our developing national cinema. I will focus on the political-activist musical *Sarafina!* (1992), the HIV/AIDS awareness film *Yesterday* (2004) and the Academy award winner for Best Foreign film (2005), *Tsotsi*.

The concluding portion of this essay will focus on my own dissertation film and its endeavor to highlight and address the problems in the South African film industry by mobilizing people's minds.

My Thoughts

Post-apartheid South African cinema could best be described as a 'text book' cinema, a form of filmmaking that appears to be terrified of moving away from its source material (namely apartheid) and the filmic routine that it has repeated, ad nauseam, for the past fourteen years.

It is a cinema that, with a few exceptions, is dominated by an often didactic and heavy-handed educational stance charged with continually reminding us of who we are and where we come from, that we are South Africans with an unbreakable connection to the country and its defining characteristic. This decade-long approach to filmmaking has resulted in a film industry that is often shunned by its local audience and that takes refuge, and in many cases finds acceptance, in foreign film markets.

SOUTH AFRICAN FILM PRODUCTION

The Pattern

South African cinema would appear to need apartheid more than the National Party of the 1960s. While it may be seen as a badge of shame or blight on South Africa's history, in the present day it continues to provide the South African film industry with an extensive body of material upon which to base and create films. Our national cinema - in the same way that the South African nation and its people have been defined – has been assigned a particular identity in relation to the distinct qualities of the apartheid past.

Cinema of the Centre and of the Periphery

In her book *French National Cinema* film theorist, Susan Hayward, speaks about cinema functioning in a three-fold hierarchical manner that is determined and controlled by the US film industry, which occupies the top tier. The two lower layers – occupied first by standardised forms of production and then by smaller indigenous cinemas - are subordinate to and must adapt in a number of ways to exist alongside the American product. Unable to cope directly with the top (American) tier these layers in turn fracture, creating their own centres that would then seem to allow them to exist independently of each other. South African cinema occupies this third tier.

> On the third rung, what was originally peripheral (indigenous cinema) now becomes central for the following reasons. Since the indigenous industry, in this instance the French cinema industry, cannot compete with that in the United States, it tends (with the exception of periods when it participated heavily in co-productions, i.e., the 1920s and the late1950s to the early 1970s) to invest in what constitutes, in relation to Hollywood, the periphery. The peripheral (i.e., the home product) becomes central thanks to this investment. (Hayward, 13)

South African cinema in the post-apartheid era functions in a similar fashion. In the same way that the French embrace language as a distinguishing characteristic of their identity and culture, apartheid becomes a distinguishing feature of South African film. The film industry

relies on this specific past and the events surrounding it in order to differentiate itself from other international and imported American (Hollywood) cinema.

If one is to examine South African cinema over the last fourteen years, a specific pattern will become identifiable amongst the majority of films produced in this period, a pattern in which the political and social aspects present within the South African landscape are utilised and developed in the production of local film. These aspects are usually centred on apartheid and its associated problems/issues and the films function allegorically by drawing attention to these and the nation.

This form of allegory, however, sets itself apart from the allegory defined by Jameson because it is not governed by his criteria – a lack of capitalism and the public-private split. Rather, this form of allegory removes the defining third world classification that dominates Jameson's hypothesis and replaces it with another concept: The relationship between dominating international cinema forms and smaller emerging national cinemas.

In utilizing our specific past in this manner, South African cinema sets about defining itself as national because it shows events that are specific to and that separate us from other nations and their cinemas. In order to have any chance of competing with international film, this process of appropriating what makes us unique and exploiting it is completely necessary. Unfortunately, the past fourteen years have seen South African film go through extremely minimal development and this form of differentiation has begun to stagnate.

The same, however, cannot be said of the South African television industry which has - over the past decade - exhibited phenomenal growth both in its content creation and viewership. Local audiences have been extremely receptive to local programming dominated by drama (soap operas), reality television and game shows (both adapting successful international shows and their formats) and this reaction is in stark contrast to the reaction exhibited by the same audiences when asked to embrace locally made films.

This year's Academy award winner for Best Foreign film *Tsotsi*, which is a South African film, would appear to be an exception to the local film trend but this will be investigated later on.

Reaction to Local and International Film

The South African film industry is dominated - like France - by American film (as are most parts of the world) and as a direct consequence local audiences have been raised to view film in a specific way. They have come to expect certain things from their cinema experience – usually entertainment and thrills – and, as a result, local audiences are often unresponsive to the filmmaking routines that are employed by local filmmakers. International film is perceived as fun and exciting, while the local product, in most cases, tries to be instructive and socially meaningful.

When a locally made film is released into the local market, often driven by a didactic message, an audience often responds negatively because the film does not speak the same language that its viewers have been raised to expect.

> There are many issues involved in trying to formulate an adequate response to the public's rejection of local films. In the first place, [Anant] Singh is right in that South Africans have grown up on a diet of American movies and imbibed along with that the idea that movies are international commodities as opposed to national cultural products like dance, theater, or even literature. (Saks, 144)

Audiences are reluctant to embrace local film because they have, in most cases, already been exposed to its narratives (often through first hand experience, the local news or repetition of a particular subject and themes) and it does not fulfill the critical requirements they have come to expect from international film. Financially these films fail. Local film, for these reasons, is often perceived as being doomed from the start and so is forced to focus on the periphery, as Hayward has stated, because it is pushed out from the Hollywood-dominated centre.

In the case of French filmmaking, there is an introspective turn towards local audiences with their film practices focusing on the local market solely.

> The peripheral (i.e., the home product) becomes central thanks to this investment. However, because the industry knows how difficult it is to export (especially to the United States), it produces films for the indigenous market only. (Hayward, 13)

This has its benefits because the filmmakers are no longer concerned with reaching a wider international audience and producing (an often inferior) product that tries to compete with America directly. The indigenous audience is catered to exclusively and French film is allowed to develop its home viewership. This allows an appreciation for the local product to develop, but also runs the risk of becoming complacent in its practices because the motivation to produce a higher-class product, one that can compete with America, is lost.

> The immobilism in production practices (producing for a safe home market), which the Hollywood ascendancy imposes, leads to an unwitting complicity on the part of the industry in the construction of a national cinema. (Hayward, 13)

Even when the French market adapts to escape the constraints placed on it by American cinema it still finds itself under its control.

The South African Reaction

The South African film model works in the opposite way. Instead of focusing on their own audience, and developing film for them, South African filmmakers turn their attention and skills to the overseas market.

While this may sound like a process of direct competition with America, these filmmakers have simply chosen to locate themselves within, and compete from, another peripheral zone, one located outside the country. Instead of developing films for the home audience, they develop them for export to the independent overseas film market and festival cinemas. The goal is to garner international acclaim and awards so as to find financial security through overseas, distribution deals.

It is also hoped that this approach will help a film find favour with the South African market because once it has won awards overseas a South African film can be reclassified as an international film product. This reclassification will allow that film to find acceptance with its home audience because if an overseas audience finds it filmically satisfying then it must no longer be a 'national cultural product' as defined by Saks. It is debatable how effective this approach really is.

Ultimately, in order for this process of exportation and re-importation to be successful, the film product must be able to differentiate itself from other national cinemas and American film. This is done by drawing on national characteristics specific to the territory from which the film originated. In most cases – as discussed earlier – apartheid is utilized. Without this specificity, a film has nothing to ensure it will stand out.

SARAFINA!

> Sarafina! follows a young girl, Sarafina (Leleti Khumalo), who, like other young students, adopted a campaign of resistance against the police presence in their schools. She imagines the support of her role-model, Nelson Mandela, who is her inspiration to survive. Sarafina finds an ally in her teacher, Mary Masombuka (Whoopi Goldberg) who supports the students in their rebellion against the police presence and who is ultimately arrested for her support of the students. Sarafina! is the story of innocence giving way to experience, of hope battling with despair. It is a film that burns with a raw truth about life in apartheid South Africa. (Cannes 2004 Product listing, Video Vision)

Sarafina! is a film based on Mbongeni Ngema's successful Broadway production of the same name and the events leading up to and including the 1976 Soweto uprising. While it may not be a true democratic/post-apartheid film – it was released in 1992 – I feel it represents the genesis of the model upon which the majority of South African cinema is now based. For the past fourteen years, the South African film industry has deviated only occasionally from this filmmaking structure.

Sarafina! as a film represented an idealistic outlook on the future for both its central character and the newly liberated South African nation at the time of its release. This approach has certainly changed to one that is more sombre, or post-idealist if you will, over the course of the last decade – with films focusing on social concerns such as crime and the AIDS pandemic – but regardless of how South African content has been/is conveyed it, in the majority of cases, continues to operate within and be delivered in the same form or structure. *Sarafina!* first exhibited the filmic structure and production practices that were to be embraced by the majority of South African filmmakers and, as a result, those practices that would come to dominate the South African film industry since the early 1990s. Regardless of how South African film subject matter has evolved – I would argue that it is still tied too closely to apartheid themes - this particular film form, and the production practices around it, has not changed significantly.

As can be identified in the synopsis, apartheid history largely informs the narrative structure and characters and this in turn draws attention to the real world events that the film is based

on. Having been released in 1992, the use of such material might not be questioned because South Africa had only begun to take steps towards democratic freedom in 1990 (with the release of Nelson Mandela). It could be perceived simply as a piece of cathartic cinema speaking out against the evils of the apartheid system. This may be partly true, however, I would argue that the main reason this film was made would appear to be for reasons of capital.

> In other words, cinema is both an industry and an art (in the largest sense of the term). Being an industry, it has to comply with commercial exigencies. If, as a national cinema, it cannot respond to the market forces of supply and demand, then distributors must import to keep exhibitors and audiences satisfied. Thus, the concept of a national cinema becomes quite subsumed within the more important order of capital. (Hayward, 22)

Sarafina! The Musical

This model of filmmaking, dictated and controlled by the demands of capital, is not unique to the film version of *Sarafina!* only. Its predecessor, the stage play, was also defined by and born out of its relationship to capital.

There was certainly a great misunderstanding on my part when it came to *Sarafina!* the Broadway musical. I had always perceived its creation and performances abroad as a means of raising awareness and inciting action against apartheid, a form of protest theatre geared towards ending those atrocities. However, upon learning that the theatre production was created entirely in America, that it had no connection to the Soweto uprising until Winnie Mandela suggested it should and that the production was merely a knock-off of true protest theatre (such as *Woza Albert!*), its true focus became clear.

Director Mbongeni Ngema sold *Sarafina!* to overseas investors on the perceived exoticism of the South African climate – both culturally and politically – which he knew an overseas audience would lap up.

> Encouraged by Harry Belafonte to produce a musical which would rely heavily on the *mbaquanga* music made popular by South African jazz musicians such as Hugh Masekela, Ngema's theatre piece, despite its township trappings, was born in exile and bred for export. (Colleran, 232)

While there is nothing wrong with this – Ngema is obviously an astute businessman – the play is misleading and deceptive. It sells itself as protest theatre when it is in fact traditional, commercial theatre. An overseas audience, however, perceives what it sees as being historically and factually correct. Taking the events in the play at face value they latch on to it because they do not for a second doubt that it might not be real.

> In the United States, black South African theatre also is assumed to communicate the single, unified vantage point of black South Africans as *authoritative* and *authentic*. Hence, the testimonial weight these dramas bear is more considerable in the United States than it is in South Africa, where critical, committed, and confrontational theatre can be more easily separated from its manipulative imitators. (Colleran, 229)

Any questioning or criticism that may have arisen, as to its validity and authenticity, was (to use Colleran's phrase) disabled because to critically unpack the production would only have done further harm to the already afflicted children from Soweto.

> *Sarafina!*, by its promotion of the distant but historical 'real', by the urgency of the South African situation, by the prevailing sense that international outrage could play some role in dismantling apartheid, and most of all, by its pathetic appeal via the use of suffering children, effectually disabled critical judgment in the US. (Colleran, 233)

Shielded from any negative comments or press *Sarafina!* was, and still is, allowed to have its way, if you will, with international audiences because of its subject matter and regardless of its actual quality.

It is quite disheartening to know that something as serious as the Soweto uprising was – and continues to be – employed merely as a device to attract investors and audiences to watch *Sarafina!*: *The Musical*. It leaves one feeling cheated because the production had no real intention of affecting change. If it had, it would have been created in a different manner. Surely, beginning its life in South Africa and in front of local audiences where it could attack and interrogate the apartheid problem at its source, at the indigenous level? Instead *Sarafina!* was created thousands of kilometres away in front of foreign audiences, the large majority of whom could not completely grasp the severity of the situation. Upon closer investigation, it becomes clear that *Sarafina!* was not trying to change anything but was, and still is, simply

using the importance associated with its relationship to apartheid to appeal to and attract audiences. The Broadway production of *Sarafina!* was firstly concerned with economics and then politics – even when it employed and used political themes as if they were its primary focus.

Sarafina! on stage provided *Sarafina!* the film with more than just a narrative and characters. It provided the movie with the means to succeed in the international film market.

Through the use of politically fuelled material, involving the Soweto uprising, the filmmakers responsible for the film version of *Sarafina!* knew that they could penetrate the overseas market. Firstly, its story was unique to South Africa and was internationally recognized because it was part of a specific history. Secondly, it would be emotionally impactful because of its status as a victimized art of apartheid. As a further result no one would question the filmmakers or the film's motives. And, thirdly, the filmmakers knew that they could not fail because the theatre production, and the model it used, had already proven its success on Broadway and in other international arenas.

> Its 'South African' trappings – the Zulu dancing, the *mbaquaga* music, the animal skin costumes, the cast of (mostly female) children – are more ornamental than anything else, and are included, again as pre-eminently authenticating gestures, in order to satisfy the vague expectations of the metropolitan audience assembled to watch the 'real thing'. The narrative of the young schoolgirl's political awakening via the efforts of her energetic, committed schoolmistress is sufficiently reductive that it easily became a Hollywood movie. (Colleran, 232-233)

Sarafina! The Film

Sarafina! began filming in South Africa on October 7th 1991 and premiered at the Cannes international film festival on May 11th 1992. The film was the first South African feature ever to be screened as part of the festival's Official Selection. Its filmmakers, actors and a host of international stars, including Whoopi Goldberg, attended the premiere.

The film's initial screening appears to have been well received and garnered a 10-15 minute (depending on which press release you read) standing ovation. According to press releases, initial reactions were extremely positive.

> Wayne Duband, President of Warner Bros International commented that he "had not seen a reaction like this since E.T. ("Sarafina!" – Standing Ovation in Cannes, Videovision Entertainment)
>
> The press conference was another moving experience as the principals and cast saw members of the media take to the floor to announce that SARAFINA was an important movie. ("Sarafina!" – Standing Ovation in Cannes, Videovision Entertainment)

From Cannes *Sarafina!* premiered in Los Angeles (at the American Film Institute International Film Festival) where it was hoped that the themes displayed in the film would help to unite Los Angeles after the 1992 race riots that had taken place there.

> Adds Harvey Weinstein, Co-Chairman of Miramax Films, who are the North American distributors of SARAFINA, "The international audience who viewed the film last week in Cannes were all equally affected by SARAFINA's moving powerful look at the people of South Africa's struggle for freedom. I'm honoured that this film has been selected to play a small role in the healing process in Los Angeles. ("Sarafina!" Selected by the AFI International Film Festival …, Videovision Entertainment)
>
> *Sarafina!* was then picked up for U. S. distribution by The Walt Disney Company. It debuted to the American public on 600 screens across the United States in September 1992. South African audiences would have to wait until October for a release across 35 screens where it would go on to break local records and out gross international films such as *Ghost*, *Sister Act* (both starring Whoopi Goldberg) and *Terminator II.* ("Sarafina" Breaks S.A. Box Office Records, Videovision Entertainment)

The "success" of *Sarafina!* would appear to bring into question my motives for wanting to analyse a film, that seems to have done extremely well, on the basis that there is something wrong with the way it was born and functions. I agree, breaking local cinema records and acquiring international distribution deals is a positive experience. The problem, however, is not so much with *Sarafina!* as a film on its own, as a single entity, but with it as the originator of a specific type of South African national cinema.

Apartheid Driven Cinema

Sarafina! represents the formation of a cinema dominated and run by filmmakers who, through its success both as a play and as a film, realised the potential for utilizing the apartheid story as a means of obtaining international financing, attracting Hollywood stars and securing overseas distribution deals and promotion.

> Born of international appetite and not of local struggle, the demand for apartheid drama occasioned the drama itself; the capital availed itself and the audience identified itself long before even the subject of the play was finalized. (Colleran, 233)

As a result, I would argue that the majority of South African cinema produced over the last fourteen years - much like French cinema operating on the periphery – is, and has been, largely complacent. The pattern for making South African films has become standardized and the films themselves have become standard commodities that camouflage their mediocrity with a social awareness or political stand. They operate under the assumption that a film made for a good cause is immediately a good film. This is not the case, but viewers and critics are often loathe to critically unpack and condemn a film of this nature because it appears to want to inform some means of change or promote awareness around a certain issue.

> I don't mean that to sound overly frivolous; if noble intentions automatically made great movies, "Sarafina!" would be among the greatest. But the makers' intentions seem inadvertently undermined by underdeveloped char-acters and vivid scenes of brutality. (Hicks, deseretnews.com*)*

Sarafina! is able - in the majority of cases - to hide its flaws and is protected from negative criticism because, like the stage play, it utilizes subject matter of a sensitive nature for its storyline and is promoted as a film that can make a difference. In the press releases sent out by Videovision Entertainment the film's social importance is repeatedly highlighted and this detracts attention, rather effectively I will say, from the simple question of, "Is it a good film?" "Does it satisfy the requirements of well-crafted cinema?"

This of course is a completely subjective line of questioning and any answer I give may vary greatly from the answer given by another person. Further questions such as, "Good in relation

to what?" and "Compared to which films?" must also then be asked. As complicated as it may appear, these are important questions that never get asked of South African cinema of this kind, with the result that these films never go through any development.

Is *Sarafina!* a good film? In my opinion, I would say no. It is far too obvious and didactic in its approach to both its apartheid influenced material and the audiences who will watch it.

Sarafina! is a cinema of education that neglects the primary focus of film going audiences; intellectual and emotional involvement. It presents its story and the events of the Soweto uprising in a linear manner that simply turns it into a history lesson.

Instead of the films social and political environment conditioning and developing *Sarafina's* narrative and characters, its message restricts development by simply pulling audiences along to its final conclusion. That being, that apartheid was an atrocious period of South Africa's history.

This obsessive attention to its message prevents *Sarafina!* from even being placed in the same category as a film such as *City of God*, one that focuses on childhood gangs living in the slums of Brazil during the late 1970s.

Both *Sarafina!* and *City of God* have similar themes but the latter is not bogged down by these. *City of God*'s narrative is allowed to breath and develop, and in the same process involves its audience because it is not governed by a final point or conclusion. There is no direct – didactic – instruction and this makes for a far more stimulating and rewarding film experience.

DARRELL ROODT AND ANANT SINGH

Sarafina!'s producer, Anant Singh, and its director, Darrell James Roodt, have made a living from making films that utilise the *Sarafina!* model of filmmaking that embraces – as a result of the demands of capital and competition from international film products – social and political themes as the driving force for not only their narrative structures but also their business models.

Before *Sarafina!* Singh and Roodt had made three other anti-apartheid films together. *Place of Weeping* (1986) was the first anti-apartheid film to be shot entirely in South Africa and the first film of Roodt's that Singh financed. This was followed up with *Tenth of a Second* (1987), a film that "tells of an English school teacher cum apartheid fighter who tries to understand his country amidst his own wasted personal life" (Rudolph, IMDb) and, the anti-war film *The Stick* (1987). Since then they have worked together on nine films in total and out of this number, seven have been driven by an apartheid influence or social theme.

Their films made during the apartheid years cannot be denied their status as forms of protest or awareness film. There was certainly more at stake during this period than just financial security. Singh (an Indian male) and Roodt (a white male) were taking great risks, firstly, by working together during this period and, secondly, by producing work that spoke out against the dominant ideology that governed the country and themselves. Roodt's actions during this period also highlight his position.

In 1987 he refused to make cuts to his movie *The Stick*, a film about a military unit fighting in an unnamed African country. Although the location of the film's narrative was not disclosed, its allusions to the Angolan war – which the SADF (South African Defence Force) was involved in from the early 70's through to the late 80's - did not go unnoticed. The National Party government wanted the film to be cut, Roodt refused and his film was banned until the 1990's.

These films of Roodt and Singh were made during a time when they were needed and people had to be made aware of the situation in South Africa. Come liberation this urgency to inform would be expected to fade gradually, becoming unnecessary because the change Singh and Roodt had wanted to affect through their films had finally taken place. This, however, does not appear to be the case because a number of Roodt and Singh's films, to this day, continue to utilise the same protest approach they employed with their first three films.

The celebratory nature of a film like *Sarafina!* and its use of these protest elements, can to a certain degree, be understood. I have previously acknowledged it as a form of catharsis, but for overseas reviewers to question the choice of subject matter for the film only further highlights the fact that this type of film was – in 1992 already - somewhat misplaced.

> Also the movie suffers from its mid-Seventies setting in which Nelson Mandela's continued imprisonment is an essential narrative element. It makes it feel dated and the closing credits informing us that Mandela has since been released from jail will probably not come as big news to anyone already present in the audience. (Baumgarten, austinchronicle.com)

> Based on the real children's resistance movement in Soweto in the mid-1970s, "Sarafina!" unleashes images of now-archetypal facets of South African political life: the funerals, the stone-throwing youths and so forth. (Howe, washingtonpost.com)

These quotes highlight that the apartheid themes found within *Sarafina!* had mostly become redundant, that the spirit of protest found within the film was certainly geared towards something more than just informing audiences about the apartheid past.

Cry, the Beloved Country

In 1995 Singh and Roodt would continue this filmmaking tradition by producing the second screen adaptation of Alan Paton's novel *Cry, the Beloved Country*. On a production level this film operated in the same manner as *Sarafina!* had three years earlier. Sold to overseas investors (Miramax films again) for distribution before the film was completed, it starred international artists – James Earl Jones and Richard Harris – and local starlet Leleti Khumalo. It had its worldwide premiere at the Toronto Film Festival and was greeted with a standing

ovation that lasted five minutes. The media once again, like *Sarafina!* before it, "[took] to the floor to announce that CRY, THE BELOVED COUNTRY was an important movie." ('Cry, The Beloved Country' – Receives a Standing Ovation …, Videovision Entertainment) Once the film had generated sufficient buzz overseas, it was released to South African audiences on the 27th of October 1995.

The only progressive element about this film was that it represented a shift in the story told by *Sarafina!*. Its focus was no longer on the struggle and personal involvement for liberation during apartheid, but rather on the effects of apartheid.

The production of this film and the shift in narrative focus for filmmakers Roodt and Singh mirror the changes in the collective consciousness of South African society at the time. It appears that as a nation South Africa had finally begun to acknowledge its defining past, in a Hegelian manner, and now needed to develop a new consciousness. This shift further acknowledged the period of reconciliation that had begun to take place in South Africa, with the formation of the TRC, shortly after democracy had been attained in 1994.

Singh and Roodt, while certainly not adapting their production practices, did adapt their subject matter accordingly, with Singh waiting for the appropriate – and most beneficial - moment to produce *Cry, the Beloved Country*.

> Producer Anant Singh has said he wanted to wait to film this version of *Cry, the Beloved Country* until after apartheid's death so that the new climate in South Africa could provide a more hopeful backdrop. (Berardinelli, movie-reviews.colossus.net)

With this adaptation process the apartheid themes evidenced in earlier film productions mutated or evolved into another brand of cinema, one that focused on reconciling the apartheid past.

Although *Cry, the Beloved Country* appears to have been well received, certain critics again highlighted the film's, and as a result the filmmaker's, persistent allegorical tendencies.

> We go expecting to be inspired and uplifted, and we leave somewhat satisfied in those areas, but with reluctant questions about how well the story has aged, and how relevant it is today. (Ebert, rogerebert.com)

Again, with these comments the apparent social/political purpose of an Anant Singh and Darrell James Roodt film is brought into question and with it the model which they use to make these types of films.

To be fair, Singh and Roodt have not focused solely on films of this nature. Both the producer and the director each have another side to their filmmaking personas that focus on film as a form of entertainment. Between 1995 and 2004 both immersed themselves in making and producing various international features. Roodt would direct a widespread of genre driven films – ranging from Science Fiction to Thrillers – starring certain well-known, but often B-grade, performers including Natasha Henstridge, rap artist Coolio and Robert Patrick.

These films, because they are not protected by a social or political issue can be critiqued in their entirety and, certainly in the case of Roodt, reveal that this aspect of his career is quite pedestrian when compared to his politically driven features. Roodt has not received any international acclaim for his entertainment driven films and they often receive disappointing critical reviews, as can be evidenced in the extracts below for two of his films, *Father Hood* (1993) and *Dracula 3000* (2004).

> *Father Hood* is a mess from beginning to end. Starting off at a screaming pitch, the volume simply escalates and crests about a quarter of the way in. The story itself is told ineffectively and that which we can grasp clearly, we almost wish we hadn't. Director Roodt *(Sarafina!)* often leaves us wondering where a scene is taking place or exactly what is going on. Subplots are introduced and abandoned like yesterday's Kleenex. (Baumgarten, austinchronicle.com)

> You...you just won't believe it. I mean it. If I were somehow struck insane and therefore able to pen the screenplay for "Dracula 3000," affix some postage to it, and get it to a low-rent production house, their inevitable (and entirely fair) response would be: "Hey thanks. We have a parrot over here that's been pooping in an ashtray. (Weinberg, efilmcritic.com)

Reviews of this nature draw attention to the fact that Roodt would appear to be a fairly incompetent director. The *Dracula 3000* reviewer's comparison of the film to an Ed Wood movie (a director who was voted the worst of all time) is definitely not a compliment. This facet of his career, however, is fairly unknown and I would argue over-shadowed, with his future career – to a large extent – protected by the fact that he has made 'important' political/social cinema. Like a political/social issue preventing a film from being critiqued, the social/political films a director makes would appear to protect his career from criticism also.

Between 1995 - 2004

During this hiatus from the filmmaking practices that established Roodt and Singh as international filmmakers, the *Sarafina!* model would be adopted by scores of other filmmakers. They too would adapt their filmmaking practices according to the social and political climate evidenced with *Cry, the Beloved Country*, embracing themes of reconciliation, and would sell their films to investors and audiences alike on the social/political importance they had imbued within them.

1997's *Jump the Gun* – about the lives of six South Africans formerly separated by apartheid now living and working together, *Promised Land* (2002) – about a former expatriate coming back to the newly liberated South Africa, *Forgiveness* (2004) – about a former apartheid police officer and his journey to receive forgiveness for the murder of a political activist, and *Amandla! A Revolution in Four Part Harmony* (2002) – a documentary that examines the role music played in the struggle against apartheid; represent only a handful of films of this nature.

Through these films, and a host of others, this model was largely established as the model of filmmaking employed by the South African filmmaker. Other filmmaking models did exist, but they were not nearly as prominent as the *Sarafina!* model.

YESTERDAY

In 2004 Roodt and Singh returned to this style of filmmaking with *Yesterday*, a film that examined HIV/AIDS in rural South Africa. *Yesterday* told the story of a rural woman of the same name, played by Leleti Khumalo, who upon hearing that she is HIV positive makes a decision to try and survive long enough so that she can see her daughter, Beauty, go to school. As her struggle intensifies she is forced not only to cope with the virus, but also with the stigma and fear surrounding the sickness.

Singh's quotes concerning the film highlight his and Roodt's return and its single difference when compared to *Sarafina!*.

> After I read the script, I thought about how essentially apartheid has been substituted by this pandemic and now we should do something. (Keeton, yesterdaythemovie.co.za)

As a film, *Yesterday* could best be described as *Sarafina!* in new clothing. As Singh's quote indicates, the film represented a further transition or development in the subject matter used to carry the films made by himself and Roodt. It represented a change from the political forms of previous features to one that was socially driven and aware. The topic of HIV/AIDS replacing apartheid would seem to indicate a form of progression for the filmmakers, but unfortunately the production practices concerning the film remained exactly the same when compared to those employed by *Sarafina!* twelve years before it.

Again, a serious issue was activated to drive the narrative of a South African film, as well as the reach and resulting impact it would have with audiences – both locally and abroad – and with investors and distributors. *Yesterday's* production process and life cycle was a facsimile of the one utilised by *Sarafina!*.

Similarities

In order to ensure their (Roodt's and Singh's) financial security and to be able to sell *Yesterday* overseas, they again utilised a serious social concern, one even more sensitive than the horrors of apartheid.

Firstly, by employing the topic of HIV/AIDS as the subject matter which drove the narrative, *Yesterday* was able to obtain the funding it needed in order to get made. Local pay television station M-net, the National Film and Video Fund, Distant Horizon, Exciting Films and the Nelson Mandela Foundation all signed on to make the film for reasons of creating awareness and, "spreading the message of prevention, caring for and supporting those infected and affected by the pandemic and most importantly highlight[ing] the need to remove stigma and discrimination." (MR NELSON MANDELA'S ENDORSEMENT OF YESTERDAY", Videovision Entertainment)

The topic of HIV/AIDS also had wider appeal when compared with the theme of apartheid because it is a universal and nondiscriminatory disease that affects all people on a global scale. It is a great concern for not only South Africa, but also the rest of the world, and its marketability to a global audience – within a film wishing to show its effects and consequences – can be understood entirely. The script for *Yesterday* was sold to its investors, like *Sarafina!* before it, as a film of importance designed to promote awareness and implement change.

Secondly, this "importance" ensured that *Yesterday* would survive its exportation into the overseas market. The sensitive nature of its subject matter prevented the film from undergoing any critical assessment and the film, much like *Sarafina!*, was lauded for being a good film as a result of being made for a good cause. Its flaws could not be brought into question and any attempt to criticize the film meant the one responsible was as inhumane as the virus itself.

> If someone walks out and doesn't say that as an individual, or organization, company or government, they need to do something, then they don't have a heart. (Keeton, yesterdaythemovie.co.za)

The current controversy around HIV/AIDS in South Africa – as a result of, amongst other things, Health Minister Dr Manto Tshabalala-Msimang and her dietary approach to combating the virus with beetroot and potatoes as opposed to anti-retroviral drugs, as well as the ANC government's failure to acknowledge the established scientific fact that HIV infection can lead to AIDS – has meant that this issue has received worldwide attention. Film, and media in general, are under an obligation to inform the masses about the disease as well as to capitalize on this exposure, even if it is in a negative light.

Thirdly, *Yesterday's* penetration was further guaranteed by the film's unique and unexplored landscape. The remote rural setting, the impoverished community of women who live within it – having no electricity or running water – and the sense of isolation that accompanied these aspects was, and still is, uniquely different from the lives of many cinemagoers. These elements provided *Yesterday* with the exoticism, evidenced in *Sarafina!*, that it needed to strengthen its penetration into the overseas market because it provided viewers with a world that few of them had ever seen before.

Language was also another aspect that helped in this respect. In the press releases sent out by Videovision entertainment *Yesterday* was not only promoted as a story about a rural woman with HIV/AIDS, but also as "the first-ever isiZulu feature film." (Singh's Isizulu Film for World Aids Conference in Bangkok, Videovision) The absence of the English language and the dominance of Zulu heightened the difference between this film and the English dominated products that are usually imported from abroad.

> Local product feels Hollywood competition intensely because of its culture's social and cultural proximity to the USA. There is not as large a gap between the locally produced cinema and the dominant Hollywood cinema - both share a common language and a raft of common cultural infrastructures. (O'Regan, 86)

With *Yesterday* being shot entirely in Zulu it was able to distance itself not only from the dominant American cinema form, but also the South African film that had been made before it. The prestige of being the first in this category imbued it with importance and uniqueness

both locally and overseas. It also ensured that the film would be eligible for an Oscar nomination in the Best Foreign Film category.

Timeline

Yesterday premiered within South Africa at the Durban International Film Festival in June 2004. While this local screening indicates a slight change in production practices, the film enjoyed an extensive tour of overseas cinema festivals before, and simultaneously with, its local release. *Yesterday's* release schedule was also cleverly constructed to coincide with a number of key HIV/AIDS events. These included the 15th World AIDS Conference in Bangkok in July, World Aids day on the first of December and premiering in the South African province (Kwa-Zulu Natal) which has the highest prevalence of HIV infection (at 37.5%) in the country (Current Situation: Trends and challenges, AIDS Foundation South Africa).

The film's gala screening at the World AIDS Conference was commended, like *Sarafina!*, with a standing ovation from the international audience and it was here that the film began to garner international support.

> Singh and Yesterday's writer/director, Darrell Roodt met with Richard Gere who was enthusiastic about Yesterday and committed his support for the film. ("Yesterday" Screens at the World Aids Conference in Bangkok, Videovision Entertainment)

From Bangkok the film premiered in Italy at the 61st Venice International Film Festival in September. Again, the film was congratulated with a standing ovation that lasted fifteen minutes. More international support was obtained.

> The lead stars of Collateral, Tom Cruise, Jada Pinkett Smith and Jamie Foxx as well as its director, Michael Mann were (sic) declared their support for Yesterday when they met with producer Anant Singh earlier today. ("Yesterday" Glitters In Venice, Videovision Entertainment)

Yesterday was released in South Africa on the third of September (the same day as its Venice premiere) where it was both well received at the box office and by critics. Its virtues as an important film were continually highlighted.

The film then won the inaugural Human Rights Film Award in Venice before premiering at the Toronto International Film Festival. The reaction to the film was similar to previous responses with, "The Toronto audience [breaking] into a spontaneous applause at the end of the screening …" ("Yesterday" Triumphs in Toronto, Videovision Entertainment) It was here that the film obtained an international distribution deal with HBO films.

Yesterday was then put forward as South Africa's official entry for the 2005 Academy Awards in the Best Foreign Language Film category. During the period before the nominations were announced, the film had another gala screening at the 35th International Film Festival of India on World AIDS Day, it received a nomination for the 20th Independent Spirit Awards in the category of Best Foreign Film, closed the inaugural Kwa Mashu Film Festival in South Africa, was re-released in South Africa in January 2005 in time for the Oscar nominations and won the Best Film Award at the 3rd Pune International Film Festival in India.

In January 2005 *Yesterday* received South Africa's first ever Oscar nomination in the category of Best Foreign Language Film. In March the film lost out to Alejandro Amenábar's *The Sea Inside*.

From its production process through to its eventual success and worldwide acclaim *Yesterday*, with the exception of its subject matter, mirrored the model of filmmaking employed by *Sarafina!* almost exactly. Roodt and Singh once again turned a topical and sensitive issue into an award winning film of importance and value.

My reasons for wanting to question this model of filmmaking – when it appears to be so successful and beneficial to the local industry – may attract criticism, but *Yesterday* confirms once again that this model, while successful to a certain degree, is extremely limited and

deceptive. As a form of filmmaking it has undergone little to no change for the past twelve years and herein lies the problem.

Non-Development

By implementing the film model pioneered by *Sarafina!* (in both its incarnations), South African filmmakers never have to better their previous film efforts or filmmaking techniques. As discussed earlier, if a film or a project carries a political/social message it is protected from any serious analysis, and as a further result, critical failure. Overseas, as well as local, audiences are blinded - to a degree - by the good intentions these films have as vehicles for creating awareness around particular issues.

The fact that *Yesterday* and *Sarafina!* may not necessarily be the best films is over looked because to analyse them in a critical manner would only harm the issues they are trying to support. This lack of critical assessment ensures that, as long as a serious issue drives these films, they will be protected and guaranteed success abroad.

Without any constructive criticism, and fostered by an environment of sustained success, the filmmakers who employ this model eliminate any form of experimentation or risk taking. Filmmaking becomes a paint by numbers affair that is simply repeated with similar types of films being made that tell the same types of stories. South African filmmakers have become complacent.

The demands of capital - and the potential capital that can be made from exporting South African cinema - ensure that the international film market is catered to primarily with films such as these, while the indigenous film market is neglected.

The specificity with which the South African film product is produced and marketed has also resulted in it being judged in a particular way, using certain criteria and excluding others. South African film, like *Sarafina!*, is judged according to how international audiences receive it - because the model it utilizes is concerned with exportation - before satisfying its own

indigenous audience. The international cinemagoer, therefore, has become the target market for this particular brand of South African film, while local audiences would appear to be an afterthought.

I would argue that the success experienced by films such as *Yesterday* and *Sarafina!* at the local box-office, and reported in various press releases, has more to do with hype surrounding their success abroad (winning awards and accolades at international film festivals) and their subject matter than actual audience approval because they cannot be analysed correctly.

These films appear to do well, but they do not do so well that their makers can focus their attention solely on the local market. There is still a large amount of reluctance from the majority of the local viewership to watch South African film.

Local audiences are continually expected to embrace a product geared for audiences outside the country, audiences who have not been exposed to South African culture and stories. The local audiences' familiarity with these stories – having been exposed to them in a number of ways prior to a film's release – means that that film's selling points overseas, its perceived uniqueness and authenticity, have little or no influence over local viewers because they live within and have become accustomed to this 'unique' and 'authentic' climate. These stories, as a result, are often mundane to a local audience.

Instead of addressing this unwillingness and the actual problem, the film product, it appears that these filmmakers believe that local audiences are to blame and are the reason why local film fails at home. This cycle of exportation and re-importation, driven by the demands of capital, then repeats itself and this process represents the dominant national cinema found within South Africa.

In order to shake off this complacency – similar to the one experienced by French filmmaking – and to develop a film model that is, firstly, more representative of the present South African climate and national situation and, secondly, that will satisfy the expectations that American

film has developed within South African viewers, it is imperative that filmmakers turn their attention back to local audiences.

AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL CINEMA

As a nation, Australia is a country that has strong similarities with South Africa, both being former British colonies that have multi-cultural backgrounds and histories. As a result, how the Australians produce and have produced their film in response to American cinema might be indicative of the process our industry will, or does need to, take in order to establish a unique cinema of its own.

The Australian cinema form had its resurgence in the 1970s with films like *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975) and then its meteoric rise in the 1980s with films like *Crocodile Dundee* (1986) and the *Mad Max* Trilogy (1979, 1981 & 1985) establishing it as an international cinema with its own distinct characteristics and flavour, and placing it with an almost 40 year head start in front of South African film production practices. It provides us with what would appear to be a perfect case study for our own industry.

In his book, *Australian National Cinema*, *T*om O'Regan identifies and analyses the unique attributes and qualities found within the Australian cinema of the 1990s, unpacking films such as *Strictly Ballroom* (1992), *Muriel's Wedding* (1994) and *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994). He identifies within them traits which make them distinctly Australian. A distinctiveness within their form and structure that has enabled Australian cinema to become something that is immediately identifiable as a particular type of cinema, as opposed to being a faceless clone or poor imitation.

Using a five-stage model of cultural transfer pioneered by Yuri Lotman, O'Regan plots the development of not only his native cinema, but also cinemas from other nations influenced by Hollywood and imported film.

By analysing South African cinema in the same way, I believe it will be possible to identify where our own indigenous industry lies in relation to the Australian model of development, as well as to identify solutions to the complacency our own industry appears to be locked within when it comes to its relationship with the dominant American form.

Lotman's Model of Cultural Transfer

Lotman's model of cultural transfer can be identified as five stages of development that operate alongside texts received and produced within a particular region or territory. This territory is usually culturally weaker than the regions it receives texts from and this model is able to trace its progression from a receiving culture to one that becomes a transmitting culture. As a model, it is not rigid in its approach, various stages co-exist at any specific moment.

As a film culture, Australian cinema finds itself in a lower status position when compared to American cinema and, as a result, it is the culturally weaker of the two. Dominated by international film, it is born a receiving culture, but as it undergoes development - from the first to the fifth stage - it becomes a transmitting culture of its own.

The First Stage

The first stage of Lotman's model - when operating in the Australian context - places great value on American and imported film products. Local audiences, filmmakers and critics hold these texts in high regard over and above local and indigenous film offerings.

> They hold a position in the scale of values, and are considered to be true, beautiful, of divine origin. (Lotman, 146)

The imported product is believed to be the model that filmmakers and audiences should embrace when developing and viewing film. This viewpoint, however, is met with criticism from advocates who claim that by embracing the international form the local cinema will simply become its clone. This site of conflict between local and international texts allows development to move into the second stage.

> The standpoint of later stages promotes this stage as a false consciousness to rail against as a means of moving on to and legitimating later stages of cultural transfer. (O'Regan, 217)

The Second Stage

In the second stage the imported texts influence the development of the local product and this is evidenced by local adaptations and remakes of international products.

> Lotman insists, 'translations, imitations and adaptations multiply" and 'the codes imported along with the texts become part of the metalingual structure.' (O'Regan, 218)

The imported text now provides the framework or structure for various productions, while the indigenous climate provides the subject matter. This leads to a great deal of criticism against the local product for being unoriginal. This duopoly, however, between producing texts that are replicas of the imported product and producing a distinctive version of the original does result in the development of the indigenous film culture.

> But there is more to this stage. It includes 'a predominant tendency to restore the links with the past, to look for 'roots' (Lotman 1990: 147). The 'new' is now interpreted as 'an organic continuation of the old, which is thus rehabilitated'. (O'Regan, 219)

The local product undergoes a process of transformation and negotiation.

The Third Stage

In the third stage the local product now embraces its difference in response to the imported product. National qualities and characteristics are promoted before emulating stories witnessed in the once dominant international form.

> It re-evaluates the home culture's product in a situation of assumed international comparison. Australian films can be appreciated at Cannes and the other major international film festivals, because they are true to the film-making ideals derived from over there but renovated and innovated here. (O'Regan, 220)

As discussed previously in this paper, this form of production enables the local product to become an international one of equal or similar value when compared to the dominant texts that have influenced its development.

The Fourth Stage

In the fourth stage the local product comes into its own. It absorbs the international form of filmmaking that once dominated it and produces an entirely unique product.

> It is no longer a copy. Each has its international consequences, the Australian soap and the 'Australian model' of television become seen as objects in their own right just as the *Mad Max* trilogy led to the Hollywood *Lethal Weapon* (Donner 1987, 1989, 1992 [& 1998]) series and *Waterworld*. (O'Regan, 221)

A borrowed but improved upon and now unique cinema is produced. This stage exhibits similar qualities of revision and negotiation witnessed in the second stage and for this reason may present some difficulty when trying to identify whether a film in development is at the second or fourth stage.

The Fifth Stage

The fifth stage occurs when

> The receiving culture, which now becomes the general centre of the semiosphere, changes into a transmitting culture and issues forth a flood of texts directed to other, peripheral areas of the semiosphere. … As with any dialogue, a situation of mutual attraction must precede the actual contact. (Lotman 1990: 146)

The local product establishes itself as ambitious and universal, but still able to address local as well as international audiences. Its new status as a transmitting culture is significant, but limited by the fact that the international film market still largely dominates it. These instances of transmission, as O'Regan points out, are exceptions and not the rule.

German National Cinema

German national cinema represents an intellectual and independent form of cinema that, certainly during the years of the New German cinema movement, relied on the promotion of influential directors - such as Wim Wenders and Werner Fassbinder – and their particular brand of cinema titled *Autorenfilm* (cinema of authors) to attract the interest of international cinema patrons and to reinvigorate the German film industry at home. Producing;

> A 'culture industry', in other words, for the world market; and for domestic consumption a parallel/alternative structure to television, which would function as a kind of 'cultural ecology', in the sense of mitigating the worst excesses of a commercial system that basically operated quite outside the state's control. (Elsaesser, 8)

As a model it is indicative of the intellectual tradition and national habits found within Germany and highlights that there are a number of approaches to developing and defining a national cinema. This model could certainly be embraced as an alternative/solution for South African film, but at the present time I do not feel that South African filmmakers have embraced the art aesthetic required for a film model of this nature to take root.

Where does South Africa lie Within this Model?

If we are to apply Lotman's model of cultural transfer to the South African situation, its development can be identified within the first three stages but not stages four and five.

The First Stage

The South African situation satisfies the requirements of the first stage by being a culture that is weaker and in awe of the imported cinema form. South African audiences, filmmakers and critics have been programmed to read and interpret film according to the language used by international and Hollywood film. This results in a rejection of the local product because it cannot satisfy audiences in the same manner. Acceptance and reverence for any imported product – over and above the local product – is the norm.

The Second Stage

In order to cope with this dominance, local content producers then enter into the second stage, where the imported product's form and structure is maintained but its content is replaced with indigenous elements.

Tom O'Regan uses television game shows as an example of how this stage can be identified. With *The Weakest Link* (BBC Two), *Big Brother* (Endemol), *Idols* (ITV) and now a local version of CBS's hit show *Survivor* (Airing at the moment) all being adapted, South African television would appear to be firmly rooted in stage two.

As far as local film adaptations of international film products are concerned, however, the South African industry would appear to have none. Possibly, the scope of adapting films of this nature is too broad or complex – confined by budgetary constraints – or perhaps the filmmakers are fearful that the international form will entirely consume their local/national content resulting in a product that is simply another clone. Whatever the reason, this second stage of Lotman's model in the South African context would appear to be dominated not by adaptations and re-imaginings of international films, but rather by indigenous texts such as novels and plays.

As Lotman says 'the links with the past' are restored through book-to-screen adaptations such as *Fiela se Kind* (1988), *Jock of the Bushveld* (1986) and *Cry, The Beloved Country* (1995) and stage-to-screen adaptations such as *Sarafina!*. The roots of the nation are utilised as content in an international form and this leads into the third stage.

The Third Stage

It is at the third stage that the majority of South African cinema now finds itself and one that is representative of the complacency that can be identified in local film practice. Rather than rehash the points already covered - namely how South African cinema creates a way into the

international market by using difference - I will rather be focusing on identifying why it is prevented from making the transition into stage four and five.

At the third stage, the dominant form of South African filmmaking does appear to exhibit qualities that will allow it to enter the fourth stage. The South African film – with its political/social aspirations and subject matter – certainly has become a specific type of cinema and, while it may be called our own, it is not unique to our film situation. It simply uses the model of difference employed by all foreign cinemas when competing with Hollywood.

These stage four elements are, I would argue, merely constituents from the second stage that are misinterpreted. The theme of 'our history' being appropriated in the second stage and then used in the third stage for reasons of exportation does appear to represent a particular progression or growth. When this is repeated, as has been the case, this has implanted the perception of industry growth with our own cinema form. Growth and development of the film model, however, has not taken place.

In order for a text to enter into the fourth stage, it needs to "assimilate[s] the imported matrices making them entirely its own." (O'Regan, 220) The model imposed by the imported cinema needs to be combined with the indigenous model and transformed, "into a new and original structural model." (O'Regan, 221)

The model of filmmaking pioneered by *Sarafina!* is certainly not new or original and its repetitive nature - used by filmmakers from the early 1990s to the present day – highlights this fact. As a cinema form, it has done extremely little to carve out a unique identity for itself, or even begun to embrace the imported model when it comes to making films. Far from assimilating the imported product, it seems to be continually running from it. South African film of this nature repeatedly asserts its difference, avoiding any connection or similarity to imported cinema as best it can, because to acknowledge such a connection would render it invisible. It would lose its identity.

In part this is true, but only for a limited period of time. Letting go of this particular form of specificity might result in certain cinema products and filmmakers taking a clone-like approach to film production – simply emulating the dominant model – and there will no doubt be poor imitations. This loss of the defining production practices and characteristics of our cinema might cause South African film to disappear, if you will, but it could possibly also allow filmmakers to experiment with those parts of the international cinema model that could benefit the local industry. New cinema forms might then be allowed to develop and it must be understood that in order to succeed certain moments of failure must be expected.

South African filmmakers, however, rather than embracing and adapting elements of imported cinema and making them their own, bridging the divide between local and international forms, would appear not to be concerned and the growth necessary to move from the third stage into the fourth is never realised.

Fourth and Fifth Stage

Without development into the fourth stage there can be no movement into the fifth, but again the South African model would appear to exhibit qualities found within Lotman's final stage of cultural transfer.

Films such as *Sarafina!* and *Yesterday* could be interpreted as examples of a transmitting culture – their international travels highlighting this – but they lack the duality found within true examples of this stage where an ambition exists "not only to be particular and local – to speak to the women and men of Australia [or in this case South Africa] – but also to be universal and to speak to the world." (O'Regan, 222)

Sarafina! and *Yesterday* are clearly geared towards the international market and for this reason the attention that should be paid to indigenous audiences is largely neglected with the international market catered to exclusively. The local viewership appears to be an afterthought in this process of film production.

Australian Cinema Entering into Stages Four and Five

What Australian filmmakers have done well is to embrace the international model, adapt it and as a result produce a cinema that local viewers are proud of and one that international audiences want to see. A number of techniques are employed in order to achieve this and this has led to the development of hybrid forms of cinema - combining the international and the national – that exhibit a film culture of 'in betweeness' and that plays to its strengths as a culturally weaker industry.

The reason Australian filmmakers have been so successful is due to the fact that they "transform what is the culturally weaker Australian position," into one that "turns the tables on the culturally strong." (O'Regan, 234) O'Regan's analysis of 1990s Australian film reveals and places an ugly and ordinary Australia on screen, one far removed from the glossiness of the international product. It is a cinema that focuses "on people who would be in the periphery, and cast[s] physical types into central roles who would normally be cast into supporting roles." (O'Regan, 245) Embracing the culturally weaker position, firstly, allows Australian film to establish its difference in relation to international cinema and, secondly, allows the local audience to view themselves and their country via a process of othering.

> *They're a Weird Mob*'s strategy of othering has the Australian disclosed through an outsider. His gaze on 'them' discloses who 'they', and therefore 'we' the audience are. He is the naïve one abroad in a strange land. He is the audience's stand-in. We see Australia and Australians through his eyes." (O'Regan, 252)

The local climate is examined in such a manner that it reveals hidden layers and certain sub-cultures that even the most jaded Australians find fascinating. The ordinary becomes extra-ordinary through a focus on the local and it is through this process of filmmaking that Australian cinema has established itself as one that can be counted alongside Hollywood and other imported film.

This othering presents Australians with a representation of themselves that has drawn criticism for being stereotypical and unflattering, but one that focuses on the subcultures of Australia.

Australian-ness is presented to Australians, via film, in a way that accentuates eccentricity and individualism, and this makes for a diverse cinema. Local qualities and personalities are examined in a number of unflinching and unforgiving ways, but through this process these are celebrated.

> They show that at least for this tradition of Australian storytelling, the way forward is not to overcome the stereotype (as well-intentioned criticism would have it) but to proliferate them and create rich and multifaceted ethnic stereotypes. (O'Regan, 255)

Filmmaker Leon Schuster and his brand of slapstick film driven by a definite trend of indigenous stereotypes – making him the most successful director within South Africa – would appear to be on the right track when it comes to developing cinema that pleases a local audience. Unfortunately, his efforts are not taken or considered seriously because of their perceived idiotic/stupid nature. One gets the impression that 'respectable' local filmmakers feel that what Schuster has done – identify an aspect of local cinema that could be developed and grown – is beneath them. Which is a pity because he definitely would appear to be on to something promising, even if - in terms of cinema craft - his film techniques and stories leave a lot to be desired.

In order for South African cinema to develop past the third stage of Lotman's model and into a cinema which can be held in high esteem not only by international markets and audiences, but also locally, it is imperative that a balance be found between producing film for international purposes and developing film for local audiences. A process of othering South Africa, similar to the one used by Australia, will enable local filmmakers to look past our history thereby breaking our bonds with it and allow them to approach film in a number of diverse ways.

The dominant model currently being used, however, must not be neglected – the complacency experienced by French filmmakers must be avoided – but attention has to shift to indigenous audiences so that the development of a truly successful transmitting film culture can begin.

Adapting and re-inventing the film model that dominates the South African film industry, however, is not something that will happen instantaneously. There must be a desire to change

and awareness around the problems inherent within the current model. Unfortunately, the complacency exhibited by the filmmakers who utilize this form of filmmaking would appear to have influenced local cinema audiences as well as other industry players. Indigenous cinemagoers and industry professionals are aware that South African film could be better, they are aware that it does not come close to meeting the requirements they have come to expect from international cinema but, they have unaffectedly accepted this as the nature and reality of South African film.

It is for these reasons that I filmed and directed a satirical short film, entitled *Robotic Dreams/National Nightmares*, to accompany this research paper.

ROBOTIC DREAMS/NATIONAL NIGHTMARES

My film I believe, in the same manner that John Bunyan protested against the dominance and religious doctrines used by the Church of England in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, draws attention to and attacks what I perceive to be the problems within the South African film industry. Through the process of making this film, I wanted to expose and draw attention to the national nature of this industry and highlight that the attention we pay to ourselves through allegorisation of this kind is not conducive to growth.

Robotic Dreams/National Nightmares tells the story of Tom McNeil, a young scriptwriter, who is taken to task over his new screenplay because it does not reflect the type of story that South Africans should be telling. His script, entitled *Ridiculously Radical Robots from Robotron*, chronicles the adventures of a robot from outer space who flees to earth to escape an evil race of aliens. Crash landing on earth, Robert the Robot befriends a young girl named Rachel who helps him to reach his hideout before the aliens arrive. Entirely unimpressed with the screenplay, and his severe lack of patriotism and reference to South Africa within the script, the panel who hear Tom's pitch are forced to take extreme measures. They summon the public broadcaster, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), to intervene. Tom is then forced - physically - to sell his script to the SABC for adaptation so that it might better reflect South Africa through its narrative and characters. Extremely apathetic during this process, it is only when Robert the Robot appears to Tom personally - challenging him to get the script back - that he is driven to action.

My goal with this film was to attack the dominant institutions at work within the South African film industry through a thinly veiled use of satire and comedy. As a film, I believe it does this quite well, but through the course of my research and writing I have come to realise that the organizations I have attacked have been caught somewhat unfairly in my crosshairs. Before beginning this process, I was convinced that the current state of South African cinema was a direct result of government involvement and control.

My scriptwriting and decisions as a filmmaker were informed by an assumption that the government and people closely associated with it were responsible for the social/political nature of South African film. This is not an outrageous assumption – cinema has been used to reinforce and grow the idea and concept of the nation before – and I was greatly influenced by quotes like the one below:

> Given the problematic character of each national instantiation and the inner illusion, chaos, and systematic contradiction in each great social project of national reconstruction, there is a constant danger that the center will not hold; time is of the essence. Hence, the race for representation becomes a compulsion motivated by a deep and justifiable anxiety about instability, a way of regulating ambivalence through repetitive gestures and new inventions of gesture. (Saks, 132-133)

I feel I was not completely misguided in this initial approach to South African film and the choices I made for my short film. However, as can be seen by the discussion covered in this paper, both the approach and assumption have been altered and now responsibility is placed – if you will – on individual filmmakers, who have managed to corner a particular area of the indigenous film market. It is important that I acknowledge these changes before discussing how the film functions as a piece of allegory because the direct and clearly defined, one-to-one correlation between the state as the root of South African film troubles – as portrayed in the film – is no longer so clear or direct. Certain preconceptions I had while making the film (before the writing of this essay) have now changed.

With *Robotic Dreams/National Nightmares* I wanted to draw attention to the current state of South African film because I was convinced that audiences and filmmakers alike were aware that something was at fault, but that nothing was being done to improve the situation. For this reason I aligned myself with "The satirical writer [who] believes that most people are purblind, insensitive, perhaps anaesthetized by custom and dullness and resignation." (Highet, 1962) Wishing to shake the South African cinema patron and filmmaker out of their complacency through the use of comedy, shock value and entertainment, I hoped to re-sensitise them.

The message that the film carries is one that needs to be accessed by an audience via an understanding of the current South African film climate. Looking at it now, after having written this essay, the film operates not just as a satire, but also as an allegory in that it challenges an established set of conventions and rules - instead of re-enforcing them – through the use of a narrative that has both a literal (or surface) meaning and a secondary meaning that needs to be discovered. *Robotic Dreams/National Nightmares* can be read simply as a fantasy story about a scriptwriter and his script, or it can be read more deeply as a story about a controlling and nationalistic film industry. I make no allusions to the fact that the film is incredibly direct at times with this message and where I perceived the problem to lie - the posters of President Thabo Mbeki are not the least bit subtle as is my treatment of the SABC as the source of evil in the film. Some might even say that the message at these points becomes didactic and that as a result allegory is not truly present because I am feeding the message directly to the audience. These observations may be true, but only in these instances. As a whole, I believe the film functions as an allegory because of its ambiguous nature that does require an understanding of South African film in order to be interpreted correctly.

Responses to the film further highlight the allegorical nature of *Robotic Dreams/National Nightmares* with some people completely identifying with the message hidden within the narrative and others - my mother being the prime example, who is completely removed from the workings of South African film – not understanding the film and even hating it.

The film visualizes the debate around South African film and its role or purpose by imbuing its two central characters, the scriptwriter Tom McNeil and the head of the SABC, with opposing filmic ideologies.

The head of the SABC has only the best interests of South Africa – as a collective – at heart but his constant and over zealous approach to content creation has hardened him and made him fearful of anything different. He does things out of fear, “that the center will not hold,” (Saks: 132-133) and of losing control. With this character, I wanted to establish the feeling that he was living and working within a propaganda state from which he could not escape. The video cameras watching him in his office (allusions to George Orwell’s *1984*), the Thabo

Mbeki posters in the alley and the secretive nature of the pitching panel and their connection to him – via a big red button – were meant to function as indicators that someone or something greater than all of them was in control. This presence was meant to be the state. These film elements are heightened within the film, but are representative of how I perceived the South African film industry to function at the time. As a film student and emerging filmmaker the national nature of not only the industry, but the majority of media within the country, overwhelmed me.

In all fairness the SABC has been instrumental in the development of a television culture that promotes growth (*Yizo Yizo*, *Generations*) and is by no means as static as I have portrayed it in this film. Equating the workings of the film industry with those of the South African television industry is also incorrect, the two operate differently, but for the purposes of this film I needed a figurehead and name to represent the collective evil within the film. The SABC was used, firstly, because it is easily identifiable and already represents a national collective – the majority of people who see this film know what it is – and, secondly, for shock value purposes. Before filming began there was a lengthy debate between my assistant director and myself over whether or not we should use the name and how this might – as absurd as it may seem – affect any future career paths, if the real world SABC were ever to see the film. The image and representations of Thabo Mbeki were utilised in the same manner and with the same goals in mind.

The character of Tom McNeil is the antithesis of the SABC head. He is ignorant and oblivious to the world around him, representing the individual and personal filmmaker - like myself - as opposed to a collective represented by the head of the SABC. Tom is not concerned with the outside world, but only focused on the world he creates within his mind and that he puts down on the pages of his script. His naivety represents an innocence within myself and within emerging filmmakers in general that I feel needs to be maintained in order to produce cinema that will stand out from the dominant cinema form driven by national qualities. Tom represents the stand that I feel filmmakers must take in order to make the films they want to make and not the films that an organization or larger body dictates. His struggle with and the death of the SABC head at the end of the film represents the symbolic death of the dominant

form of cinema within South Africa that I feel needs to take place. Laying to rest, if you will, one form of national filmmaking and preparing the way for new forms to develop.

Tom is not without his faults, however. His innocence can also be read as a form of stupidity and his apathy is sickening at points in the film. Yes, he represents the helplessness of individual filmmakers in the face of the dominant cinema model, but he also represents their lack of drive and unwillingness to take charge.

By juxtaposing two film cultures - Tom's fantasy world of robots and aliens with the seriousness of a national cinema designed to grow and maintain the nation - I have tried to combine concepts that would normally never be put together in order to contrast the differences between these two competing doctrines. This technique then draws an audience in through the absurdity of these combinations. The adaptation of the script, and as a direct result Robert the Robot, is the culmination of this process and I believe it suits the allegorical and satirical nature which I was trying to achieve because it maintains an audience's interest in the film through its use of humor and entertainment value so that they may be exposed to the film's secondary meaning.

Robotic Dreams/National Nightmares constitutes my first attempt at a film of this nature and running length. Upon re-watching it – months after having filmed and edited it – I am aware that it is not as refined as it could have been. Certain scenes could have been cut down (the interrogation scene and the struggle scene in particular), the music in places jars when combined with the image on screen and certain technical problems (the horrendous hum/buzz in the opening scene) should have been picked up sooner. It has its fair share of problems, but I feel that the experience gained by myself as a filmmaker and the fact that certain individuals have related so strongly to the film outweighs the film's bad points. *Robotic Dreams/National Nightmares* gets its message across even if not in the most stylized and well-formed manner.

CONCLUSION

In closing, I feel it is important to once again highlight that the choices I have made during this process of research and writing have been based upon what I have interpreted as being the most effective approach for an analysis around the perceived allegorical tendencies found within a particular style/genre of South African cinema.

Rather than incorporate an all-encompassing approach to South African national cinema – like Tom O'Regan has done with his analysis of Australian national film – I felt it was important to unpack and focus on those issues pertinent to my central argument. I realise that in doing so I have excluded other categories and elements that may form part of, and that play an important role in, the development of the local film industry. My paper appropriates those aspects linked closely to and associated with allegory in South African national cinema and I acknowledge that this course represents only one avenue of investigation into South African film.

In turn, the allegorical nature of South African cinema examined in this paper represents only one aspect of South African cinema culture. Additional filmmaking models do exist, but I feel these cannot compete with the dominance exhibited by the one examined in this essay and it is for these reasons that I have focused on this model almost exclusively.

The allegories present within South African film texts such as *Sarafina!* and *Yesterday* are not the result of a lack or an exclusion of a means of production, as Frederic Jameson has hypothesized, but rather exist as a direct result of the pursuit of capital by individual filmmakers. South African audiences, as a consequence of being exposed to and dominated by Hollywood and international cinema forms, have learnt to read and interpret film according to these models. The result being that when local films are exhibited alongside the imported product, they often cannot compete because they do not match the standards or high criteria of their international counterparts. The local audience is, therefore, largely resistant to these local offerings.

This international dominance forces South African filmmakers to then try and separate their product from the imported cinema through a process of differentiation. Qualities and stories that are uniquely 'South African' – in most cases involving apartheid history - are absorbed and utilized in order to make these films attractive to overseas audiences and investors. This process is largely successful because these films are sold abroad through a technique of assumed exoticism ('untamed' Africa is unfolded right before an audience's eyes) and protection from any critical analysis by utilizing serious political/social issues (audiences are coerced into an accepting and submissive position through identification with an important cause).

These films then receive international acclaim and are repackaged as international commodities before being re-imported into South Africa as products of, assumed, equal value and quality - comparable to the dominant international product. The buzz generated by their overseas 'success' ensures that they make an impact, of sorts, within the local market, but once this buzz has died down so does their attractiveness. They do not exert any lasting appeal for local audiences and once the fad has passed, these films are largely forgotten. The distinct aspects used to set us apart, as a filmmaking collective, from other international cinemas are mundane and uninteresting to local audiences when compared to the excitement that overseas audiences seem to experience.

A largely one sided form of filmmaking it favours international viewers and neglects the tastes and desires developed within its own audience, instead of striking a balance between the two. When the indigenous market displays a lack of interest local filmmakers are quick to blame them and the dominance of the international product for the failure of their films and not the films themselves. They then produce, and continue to produce, for international markets because they receive the approval and financial security they desire even when their product is of low filmic quality.

The main problem with this form of filmmaking is the fact that in order for it to establish a national cinema representative of the contemporary (democratic) South African climate it focuses on one particular past (apartheid and its associated issues) and sells it to viewers

outside the country, when it should be more focused on the present and selling new ideas to the inhabitants of its own country. Allegory is not so much the problem with South African cinema, but rather it is the subject matter attached to it. By continually using the apartheid past and the social aspects linked to it South African film has become predictable and uninspired.

Instead of creating new and exciting cinema forms – and in the process establishing new traditions from which future South African films can draw inspiration and be benchmarked against - the filmmakers of these films are content to utilize the same techniques and stories repeatedly because the *Sarafina!* model has been 'successful' in the past. On the one hand it may ensure their financial success, but on the other it exemplifies the complacency that exists within this portion of the South African film industry. These films represent shallow success devoid of any growth because they employ the same filmic and narrative techniques over and over. This style of filmmaking, as a result of its repetitive nature, has become the dominant form of cinema in South Africa.

In order for South African films and film culture to truly develop it is imperative that filmmakers realise the potential of the indigenous audience. The Australian model discussed and analysed by Tom O'Regan – in which Australian filmmakers have been able to find and define their own unique cinema form recognized the world over – is an example of one way in which this issue can be managed. It is by no means a conclusive approach or solution to addressing the state of and the particularities of South African cinema, but it does highlight that in order for a unique national cinema to be born it must incorporate elements from a wide range of influences and sources. It must take what it needs, exclude what it does not, combine and hybridize styles, genres and techniques and ultimately take risks because without experimentation there can be no real development. South African filmmakers have to transform their culturally weaker position – one defined in relation to the dominance of American cinema – into one that is culturally stronger. At the moment South African national cinema is simply going through the motions in order to survive against the dominant international cinema by using an archaic form of difference in order to stand out.

Eventually the social/political well from which filmmakers - like Darrell Roodt and Anant Singh - draw their creative inspiration will run dry and when that happens they will be forced to develop and pioneer new forms of South African film. Only then will South African film be allowed to develop into a truly representational national cinema reflecting South Africa's cultural diversity and numerous distinct qualities.

A Note about Tsotsi

An in-depth discussion of *Tsotsi*, and its Oscar win in early 2006, does not strike me as important because upon a closer reading the film functions in the same manner as the films that have used the *Sarafina!* model before it. It certainly does have some truly progressive elements that bode well for the development of South African cinema – it is beautifully filmed and director Gavin Hood does seem to want embrace his local audience and what they would appear to want (the contemporary Kwaito music soundtrack being a prime example here) – but in terms of subject matter, marketing and production practices it does nothing different. Utilizing a social story about a gangster living a life of crime it began its life abroad, was shown first to overseas audiences and when 'success' beckoned it was re-imported into the country from which it 'originated'. Touted as the film to put South African cinema on the world map I feel that it has, to a certain degree, but that this sense of accomplishment is/was limited. *Tsotsi* is another fad that, while it may appear otherwise, has done little for the growth and development of local cinema and audiences because it has not done anything different.

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