CHAPTER 9

CLOSING SHOTS

In this study, I have been concerned with the role of film in the public life of ideas. The restrictions imposed on Africans' experiences of film in the early and late apartheid eras, and the changing public encounters with it in the emergent post-apartheid period, provided the backdrop to the study. Thus, I have considered the critical public role of black-centred films primarily in the context of overt political repression, and in the post-repressive setting. This thesis demonstrates that throughout the films' public lives, their genres, modes of circulation, and contexts of their appropriation mediated the manner and extent of their relations to critical public engagements of black identity. The core of the thesis argument is that under certain evolving conditions and circumstances of their circulation, black-centred films stimulate critical public engagements of blackness. Censorship, orchestration, context of circulation, and importantly, contextual affiliation to contemporary social and political preoccupations and relations, constitute these conditions. The convergence of these conditions with the generic and material attributes of film, underwrites the precarious but potent status of film in the public life of ideas. The status of film is precarious because of its subjection to varied circumstances that render contingent its fecundity for critical public engagements. It is potent because the possibilities for such engagements are enduring. I will explain this seeming contradiction more thoroughly in the course of the chapter.

Importantly, this thesis enquires into the broad theoretical implications that the role of black-centred films present for the relation between 'film' and 'public', particularly in repressive and post-repressive societies. What might this relation imply for the role of film in the public sphere? At the same time as their approaches and objectives are varied, contemporary studies of film and the public sphere, share an explicit preoccupation with its role in the public sphere. Habermas' seminal work on the public sphere is the first to

raise, briefly but provocatively, the relation of film to the public sphere. It is provocative because the discussion locates film, together with other media such as radio and the 'talk show' television genre, at the centre of a declining public sphere. Film became part of the all-consuming wave of post-literate forms that, according to Habermas (1991: 170), reduced to a minimum the degree of reflection that the printed letter afforded its readers. And which he suggested, was indicative of a notable shift from a culture-debating public to a culture-consuming one. Habermas' recent recanting of his arguments notwithstanding, in which he reviews film as an adjunct to the political public sphere; his suspicions of the role of film in the public sphere remain present. The lack of a systematic analysis of the critical public import of film may account for such a hesitant acceptance of its role in the public sphere.

In considering the role of film in the public life of ideas, I have begun to engage in such analysis, in which I counter the Habermasian anxiety and suggest that film does play a role in the public sphere. While this argument is hardly new, later scholars who have been preoccupied with the question of film and the public sphere, have advanced it from different contexts and perspectives. In Germany, Kluge (1982) considered how film could potentially be harnessed formally to bring into being an alternative public sphere. Later, Hansen (1991) discussed how early American cinema-based spectatorship constituted an alternative public sphere. The limitations of the works notwithstanding, Kluge and Hansen have given impetus to the public critical valence of film and filmic discourse in a rapidly changing modern era. The approach, context and argument of this thesis are different. The thesis provides an opening into a new way of thinking about film and its publicness, which is as a text whose role in the public sphere, resides in its circulation and subjection to many uses over-time. Through this approach, this thesis surfaces the critical role of black-centred films in the ongoing and contemporary public discourses of blackness.

Black-Centred Films: Critical Public Role

Quite signally, the public lives of the films show that film exceeds its entertainment value, and does not simply affirm social and political agendas. They demonstrate the capacity of film to render problematic the very supposition of the 'messages' that the combination of their narratives and profilmic elements might be easily purported to represent. I suggest that the films in the study related to a contemporary public sphere by evolving critical public engagements of blackness. In the colonial and apartheid contexts, such reflections were surfaced through the conditions and relations of Africans' limited encounters with film. Although I do not focus on it in this study, Plaatje's bioscope provides the earliest example of this phenomenon. Through the conditions and relations in the exhibition of silent-era films, the novelty of the form and its generic attributes, as well as the discourse of racial uplift, Plaatje instituted the idea of a global modern blackness. That he did this against the background of Phillips' use of film to moralise the separation of blackness from this global modernity, set the scene for the relations of black-centred films to public discourses of blackness in South Africa.

If Plaatje introduced film as a way of bringing Africans into the fold of global modernity, *Come Back, Africa* gave it a public deliberative dimension that contested directly with the antinomies of modernity. In the latter instance, blackness attained an explicitly critical cinematic presence. For the first time in South African cinema history, the publicness of black-centred films significantly extended across a transnational sphere which threatened colonial and apartheid authorship of blackness. What this underscores is that black-centred films related to discourses of blackness by subverting the space and terms of their engagement. Before *Come Back, Africa*, the space and terms of engagement with discourses of blackness was likely to be heavily policed by the state. The public life of the film is instructive because of its instituting of a transnational public sphere around apartheid when the system was at its most insular state. A later film, *Mapantsula* would in almost identical circumstances, replicate the signal role of *Come Back, Africa*. Setting itself against the then significantly embattled apartheid; the film catalysed critical public

reflections on the relation between blackness and anti-apartheid politics. *Mapantsula* became a critical part of the anti-apartheid movement, lending a cinematic lens to it at the same time as the film disrupted conventional understanding of black identity, politics and crime. Thus, black-centred films set forth a critical relation to the anti-apartheid public sphere, by challenging one of its defining tendencies- that of assuming a homogeneous political-activist disposition in every black person.

In the 70's, the South African state's subsidy films resuscitated the practice in which official discourse mediated public reflections on black identity. Parallel to its political shifts to 'reformism' that allowed black South Africans to become permanent dwellers in the city, even if in its designated outskirts, the apartheid state in the 1970s evolved a sophisticated appropriation of film. Although endorsed by state functionaries, the idea of modern blackness gained cinematic affirmation through films such as *u'Deliwe*. The effect of black modernity as represented in the film, unlocked the potential of a counter construction of modernity in which the partial right to urbanity meant the right to make claims on the city, a right that threatened the very existence of apartheid. Thus, the critical public role of even those black-centred films that are widely designated as propaganda films was not simply in the cinematic affirmation of the modernity of blackness, but in the redemptive potential of this affirmation. The intersection between *u'Deliwe*, its paratexts and secondary texts particularly *Drum,* harboured this potential.

The emergence of a post-apartheid dispensation provided a remarkable opportunity for the free circulation and engagement of black-centred films. It also constituted a significant although not clean rupture with racial oppression, a major historical catalyst for public reflections on blackness. Against this background, *Fools* and *Yizo Yizo* centred the themes of gender, violence and sexual identity in the public discourses of black identity. *Fools* extended black-centred films' discursive relations with black identity by convening a debate about gender violence. However, its public life manifests a limit in black-centred films' capacity to catalyse critical public engagements. Beyond the spaces of expert

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commentary, the silence around the film bespeaks its critical disruption of affirmations of blackness. *Yizo Yizo* demonstrates this limit differently, by animating an extensive sphere of public engagements in the course of which arguments over its manner of representing black youth eclipsed the focus on its educative remit. This lays bare the fact that films are imbued with a critical role manifest in the publics that they bring into being, but that this role is not automatic. How then does this role become realised? How is its potential realised? I address these questions in the following section which discusses the conditions through which black-centred films animate public critical engagements of blackness.

The Conditions of Circulation and Engagement of Black-Centred Films

Notably, what I have called contextual affiliation plays a significant role in filmic stimulations of public critical engagements. I have used the phrase 'contextual affiliation' to define film's resonance with the contemporary public discourses of its circulation and engagement. For example, the discursive and critical engagements of *Come Back, Africa*, through its textual interlocutor Lewis Nkosi, was given urgency by the emergent anti-apartheid politics, and the discourse of black urban modernity articulated by the so-called Sophiatown School of Journalism- of which he was a member. *Come Back, Africa*'s unequivocal address of black urban life in the Johannesburg of the 1950s, then a patently apartheid city, immersed it in this background. Whatever the biases and level of their critical engagements, black-centred films owe their ability to stimulate critical engagement primarily to their contextual affiliation.

Yet contextual affiliation occurs discursively and it is not geographically determined. In the course of its circulation in Europe and North America, two prominent regions in the Cold War era, *Come Back, Africa* provoked some engagements in South Africa in spite of its lack of local circulation. This means that while its lack of domestic circulation relatively minimised the degree of its intervention in local debates around apartheid and black identity, its resonance with the anti-apartheid movement and critical engagements of literary liberalism, certainly mobilised some public critical discussions around it. This

shows the power of contextual affiliation, over and above the physical limits, and the legal restrictions imposed on films.

The role of contextual affiliation hints at another related observation, namely that the capacity of black-centred films to stimulate engagements is not simply determined by favourable circumstances, or otherwise. Repressive measures designed to quell the publicness of films, actually fuel the public critical role of film. *Come Back, Africa*, and largely *Mapantsula*, poignantly demonstrate this fact. Censorship or the threat of it gave impetus to the 'fugitive circulation' and engagement of *Mapantsula*, in the course of which anti-apartheid insurgents, ordinary rural and township folk, civic and student organisations traded perspectives on political strategies, 'tsotsism' and black identity. However, we cannot ascribe exclusively to contextual affiliation and censorship, the possibility of the engagements around film to flourish under unfavourable circumstances. Certainly, the films in the study have shown that largely the publics they helped convene emerged through some kind of active mediation or orchestration.

The orchestration of debates around black-centred films constitutes a distinctive and consciously interventionist condition for the enhancement of their public critical engagements. When this orchestration occurs in relation to contemporary issues, this heightens the public critical potency of black-centred films. Consequently, the point at which contextual affiliation and orchestration intersect produces ideal conditions for film's stimulation of critical public engagements. Cultural and political fora around *Mapantsula* provide key examples here. The appropriations and engagements of the film by COSAW, the *Weekly Mail* Film Festival and other groupings positioned it within the various fronts of the anti-apartheid struggle. This tendency to orchestrate public discussion through film, which is also observable in the later circulation and public lives of *Come Back, Africa*, and to some extent *u'Deliwe*, re-emerged in the post-apartheid period in relation to *Yizo Yizo*. The high level of publicness around *Yizo Yizo* profoundly illustrates the indispensable role of orchestration in certain black-centred television series and films' capacity to catalyse

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public debates. At the same time, *Yizo Yizo* shows that as orchestration aids in calling publics into being, its mediation through the media decisively determines the nature of engagement that films can stimulate at particular times.

The fact that they circulate over time means that films do not remain neatly germane to similar issues or questions. Consequently, different forms of publics and the critical responses therein come into being over-time, in relation to individual films. Any one film is subject to changing fortunes in its capacity to stimulate public critical engagements because of the shifts in the contexts of their circulation and engagement. A profound lesson suggests itself here, namely that the status of film in relation to the public life of ideas, is significantly guided and sustained by its adaptability and responsiveness to changing conditions and public discursive preoccupations over-time. This makes film a discursive phenomenon in modernity, whose public critical role is not determined by fixed conditions.

To premise the public critical competence of film solely on the above conditions is inadequate because it elides the specificity of film as a modern object and experience within modernity. In the following section, I turn to these specificities and argue that the distinctive modernity of film intricately complements its capacity to stimulate public critical engagements, particularly when modernity is its subject. These features are themselves an effect of modernity and constitute part of its nerve centre.

Particularity of Film as Form in the 'Arena' of Public Debate

In the sphere of public engagements, the genre-specific aspects of films give them a special charge when particular aspects of modernity are under scrutiny. Through their capacity to represent perceived 'reality' of black social life, black-centred films proffer social imaginaries of the modern. In their representation of black identity, they make possible the imagination of blackness in ways that are alternative to its conservative imaginaries, which distanced blackness from modernity. However, the fact that various

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forms, other than film, have the capacity to represent alternative imaginaries of black identity calls for an exposition of the ways in which films do this.

I have suggested that the effect of filmic representation, especially in early black-centred films, is in closing the discursive gap, made possible by the conservative authorship of blackness, between the confinement of black people in a passive traditionalism, and a modern social and political agency. In the following section, I discuss how this happened. Chiefly, the multi-generic manner in which music, sound, language, narrative, space and time coalesce to give a semblance of the 'completeness' of experienced reality is a trait specific to film. In other words, film commands an array of visual and aural competencies, which enable its active modelling of life. The appearance of 'real' life in film, gives it the power to 'capture' the imagination of viewers, especially when its content is local and highly recognizable. This closeness to 'reality' does not give film access to reality. It is nonetheless, consequential to the fact that important critical engagements in the non-expert publics take place without the recognition of the 'fallacy of narrative unity',[1] or of film's power to 'capture' 'reality'.

While contemporary film theory, particularly the work of Noel Carroll[2] has thoroughly brought to light the limits of the classical film theory's supposition that film reproduces nature as is, the capacity of film to produce impressions with the strongest, and closest likeness to objects external to itself, is an enduring and forceful feature of its public critical status. The textual nature of film as an object that gets circulated, and appropriated, in public, draws upon this old problematic in film theory. The popularity of *u'Deliwe* among its early viewers, and its popularization by *Drum* magazine which, avowed the film's authentic representation of township life, were based on the assumption of its access to reality. Therefore, the authority in the form, to model reality, constitutes the first site in

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[1] By this I mean the ascription of truthfulness to film on the basis of the apparent logicality of its narrative, and correspondence of its diegesis to the perceived reality of space and time.

[2] See Caroll N., 1988. *The Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory,* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

black-centred films' capacity to mediate black viewers' relation to the cinematic representations of blackness, and potentially to public engagements of blackness.

However, we can explain the particularity of film as a modern phenomenon in the sphere of public discourse in terms of the circumstances unique to the public life of films. For instance, with regard to *u'Deliwe,* the scarcity of local black images in film played a role. Thus, in certain contexts the discourse of modernity and its concretization through the technology of film has a recognisable effect in the potential engagements around black-centred films. Considered from the perspective of its sophistication, film carries the aura of the ideas of progress, of the sense of newness. Thus, the technological sophistication makes it a coveted object because it indexes modernity. In the colonial context and in the early apartheid period, the modern technology of film and the difficulty of accessing it, projected film as an important site through which urbanised blacks experienced modernity. Access to the technology became, in and of itself an important terrain for defining blackness because it was infused with the value of progress- itself officially distanced from the idea of blackness. However, this did not take place outside the public attachment of value to particular representations of black modernity. *Drum* magazine, which trumpeted the successes of black filmmakers in the 70's, drove this point home when it related Sabela and Shange's successes to its own avowed brand of black urban modernity. It would seem that the entrance of *u'Deliwe* into the fray of the already flourishing discourse of black urbanity enhanced the magazine's projection of black urban modernity by adding a cinematic dimension to it.

The authority of black-centred screen media (television and film) also came strongly through the debates around *Yizo Yizo*, which were replete with emphases on its showing of known social life. The overt representation in the film of violence, linguistic vulgarity and bodily excesses captured the imagination of the viewers. This precipitated a publicness marked by unprecedented debates around the film's representations of social life in the townships. However, the consequent drawn-out media controversy around the

representations of reality in *Yizo Yizo* or the lack thereof, constituted a different dynamic to *u'Deliwe*. This is because other questions concerning the film were raised, which were no longer precipitated by filmic authenticity and its affirmation of black modernity, but were implicitly or explicitly informed by questions of black subjectivity and morality. Therefore, the immediacy of film to lived reality distinctively appeals to the subjectivity of viewers to the effect that its capacity to call publics into being is greatly enhanced.

From *u'Deliwe* to *Yizo Yizo*, the filmic affirmation of the modernity of black identity gave way to the representational disturbance of ideas around it, in the post-repressive period. This brings me to another attribute of film, and of black-centred film in particular, its capacity to disturb ideas and to allow debate about such ideas. The intense engagements of *Mapantsula*, particularly of the figure of Panic, explicitly instance this capacity. The visual correspondence of *Mapantsula* to the contemporary problem of *tsotsism*, and the challenges of the political struggle heightened the 'reality' of the dilemma of political heroism and apolitical social strategies of survival. Thus, the capacity of *Mapantsula* to disturb viewers enabled it to enter a social and political problematic within unfolding public debates. An argument may arise as to whether it is the attribute of film as form or of how filmmakers choose to use it, that ultimately make such a disturbance possible. I argue that the manner, in which filmmakers represent images with a capacity to disturb, is made possible by the formal 'manipulability' of film itself.

One important attribute specific to film and that is illustratable in black-centred films, is its unique relation to historical time. This relation informs the archival proclivity of film. The ability of film to visually 'capture' and 'preserve' instances of events across history, and inevitably turn historical time into cinematic or filmic time, underwrites the relation of film to historical time. Historical time is transformed into filmic time when certain events or moments become inseparable from the history, organisation and cultural specificity of film itself. Film renders these moments iconic and therefore indexical of their historical facticity. The wager of this observation is that at any given moment in the circulation of

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films, this relation precipitates an intimate awareness of the historical specificity of these events among film viewers. Issuing from this awareness is the possibility for public engagements of their implications for contemporary relations. For instance, the engagements of *Come Back, Africa* during the inception of the workers' library relied on its historical specificity in the film. Importantly, the film 'authenticated' its representation of early apartheid in a way that informed contemporary anti-apartheid discourses. The inclination to rely on the visual power and historical proximity of film to events is a mark of its public discursive authority.

The mechanical reproductivity of film enables it to assemble publics repetitively over time in the form of events such as festivals, launches, political and cultural gatherings. This attribute defines film as a mass technology, which facilitates unique visual encounters with modernity for many people, and over a long period of time. Underlying the massness of film, is the effect of experiencing social life in a collective and potentially engaging manner. In the context of social and political strife, this attribute of film is particularly important for the mobilisatiion of agency.

The adaptability of film to rapidly changing formats facilitates and widens its circulation beyond the physical site of the cinema. In conditions, such as in apartheid South Africa where access to the cinema itself presupposes a negotiation of a litany of restrictive laws, black-centred films' capacity to circulate on Video or DVD, opens it to extensive appropriation and engagement in effectively fugitive spaces. Importantly then, the adaptability of film to different formats informs its potential to make possible, the autonomous organisation of experience. In contrast to Hansen's account of the early American cinema spectator, the political objective of the fugitive spaces drove the publics of *Mapantsula* away from the commercial sphere of cinema exhibition. This suggests a qualitatively different autonomous organisation of experience. This experience is qualitatively different because it took place within a political public sphere, which made possible a productive engagement with contemporary political questions.

The relaying of film in the form of paratexts and other secondary texts that come into being in relation to it catalyse its role in the public life of ideas. Accordingly, as a primary text, film is imbued with the capacity for calling publics into being but this capacity remains latent and limited. At the level of form, narrative and other elements, film harbours a tendency to draw attention either to its lack of publicness, or to the kind of publicness with which its signs may primarily affiliate. Yet, only when films' relation with public discourses through texts that emerge in relation to them, can publicness be supposed. Therefore, the operation of film through paratexts and a regime of secondary texts contributes to the ways in which film becomes a catalyst for public critical engagements.

Further, paratexts and secondary texts may be charged with orchestration of debate and deliberation as the examples of *Yizo Yizo* and the archival reappropriations of *Mapantsula* and *Come Back, Africa* show. The latter two films had whole books published on them. However, *Mapantsula* incorporated useful essays, an extensive interview and screenplay, while Davis' book on *Come Back, Africa* was based entirely on Rogosin's diary of the making of the film. The constitutive role of secondary texts is manifest in relation to all the films but is more powerfully demonstrated in the public life of *Come Back, Africa*. Banned in South Africa, the film garnered publicness in that country in spite of its absence. Thus, secondary texts and their circulation, such as reviews in the press, mediate the publicness of black-centred films in their absences as primary texts. The dominant participation of expert publics in the engagements of the films can be discerned in the secondary texts. Therefore, expert publics significantly characterize the films' publicness. However the level at which this occurred, differs with individual films.

Expert and non-expert commentary make up one level of the secondary textual regime that comes into being in the wake of a film. Through posters or bills, films do not only give a foretaste of what they are about, but also widen their publicness. They do this by inviting public engagements with the content and legends in their posters. As such, the publics of

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the posters become the publics of the film by dint of the possibility of engagement with the social meaningfulness of the elements of its content, characters or milieu, which appear in the posters. The intriguing aspect of these posters is that their thematic focus change with place and circumstances. For instance, the French poster of *Fools* was different from the South African posters in their discursive focus. Judging by the changing subjects, we can see that they consciously call different publics into being and create discursive frames consistent with the filmmakers' or distributors' intents.

If the conditions discussed above make possible the critical public engagements of black-centred films, they also explain the films' precarious status in the public life of ideas. As an instance, the capacity of *Fools* to generate critical public engagements was attenuated. This was due to the incongruence between its critical tenor and genre which tended to contradict contemporary film culture, and public preoccupations with the post-apartheid era. In spite of the precariousness explained by the unevenness in the extent and manner of the film's critical public lives, this does not however mean that the films have no potential for later public engagement. From the foregoing, it is manifest that a deferral, in which the publics that engage the films are not always contemporaneous with their initial circulation, significantly typify the publicness of black-centred films. The delay suggests that they harbour the potential to call new publics into being long after their initial circulation, and engagements. I propose that it is in their archival reappropriations that certain black-centred films are able finally to convene publics. Arising from this convening is not only the reconstruction of blackness and modernity, but also the potential appropriation of black identity in the official discourses of national identity.

I have suggested that the relations between films as media of modernity, and their focus in terms of content, with the contexts of their circulation, underwrite their potential to stimulate critical public engagements. Thus, the capacity of black-centred films to stimulate critical public engagements resides at the points of encounter between their formal particularity as modern form of representations, and resonance with the social and

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political contexts of their circulation. Without the idea of film as an object with certain attributes that are effectively modern in nature that circulates and becomes engaged in specific moments and spaces, it is not possible to determine its role in the public life of ideas.

Theoretical Implications: Film and the Public Sphere

The making and public lives of the films in the study occasion the opportunity to assess the relation between the concept of 'film' and of 'public', and ultimately the implications with regards to the question of how film relates to the public sphere. Through this study, it has become increasingly clear that an orientation towards a public characterizes film. The sphere of its circulation and engagement underscores this fact quite profoundly. This orientation towards a public means that film is chiefly marked by a tendency to constitute publics, even where a pre-existing public sphere may suggests itself, or where it may seem to be absent. Importantly, the pre-existing discourses of the public sphere, but more signally the discursive aura of the films that bring such publics into being, constitute the publics of film. This suggests a dialectic between film and public, which intensifies rather than undercuts the significance of film in relation to the public sphere. This significance can be considered against the various sites and formats in which film circulates, and the overall critical role that it plays in relation to the public sphere. It must be borne in mind however that in global grids of critical exchanges, such contributions are not confined to intimate and localized settings.

Importantly, Habermas' articulation of the public sphere in his early work, as formed around ratio-critical exchanges among co-present private people suggests itself as a contributing rationale for the argument against the role of film in the public sphere. Where co-presence is a necessity for exchanges, the need for considering virtual and ongoing communication falls away, and with it the possibility of the rational-critical exchanges in forms other than a co-present dialogue. Contra Habermas, I suggest that the

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public sphere of film does not require co-presence in the Habermasian sense, but actually effects a wide space of engagement across local and national borders. Far from heralding or characterizing a decline of the public sphere, film actually salvages its ideal of rational-critical deliberation and opinion formation among individuals who may not be co-present. Here, the trans-local and transnational circulation of film occasions a pan-global effect that makes possible a virtual public sphere. This virtual public sphere is important because it short-circuits conditions of repression in which an open atmosphere of equality may not be possible. This public or publics of strangers has the potential to articulate through the common object of film, questions and suggestions that enable a global critical agency.

An important implication to be drawn from the study is that the circulation of film as text is a central attribute of its critical public role and status in the public sphere. Appreciation of its circulation makes possible the understanding of how film relates to the public sphere. This is because the location of film in the shifts and turns of its biography, occasioned by unstable modern social and political relations, inevitably invites its equally unstable relation to such circumstances as may affect the location of its exhibition and engagement.

This thesis submits that film is not in and of itself the site of its publicity. In locating the public sphere of film spectatorship in the cinema, Hansen acknowledges as much. However, Hansen's work suggests that the cinema is a central feature of the public sphere of film. This observation may appear to relate only to the context of early American silent cinema, but it has conceptual ramifications for the relation of film and the public sphere in other contexts such as contemporary South Africa. Confining the public sphere of film only to cinema and cinema spectatorship has the unwarranted effect of disavowing the capacity of film to relate widely to the public sphere. The effect is to deny film's profound relations with social and political struggles, in conditions where access to the cinema may not be possible. This thesis argues that the public sphere of film goes beyond the cinema. Thus, film has a much wider relation to the public sphere.

I suggest that the circulation and public engagements of films offers a profound lesson concerning the relation of film to the public sphere in respect to the role that Habermas assigned to literature. The status of film in the contemporary public sphere is subject to the interactivity and convergence of a myriad of textual technologies. This very fact means that Habermas' privileging of literature, though a historical tendency in his discourse, is immaterial to the question of the role of film in the public sphere because literary forms are heavily complicit in the publicity of film and the engagements it brings into being.

Conclusions

The tendency in film scholarship has been to understand explicitly or implicitly, the relation of film to the public sphere in terms of its supposed intra-textual 'messages' and conditions of viewership, either in the physical space of the cinema, or in the conjugal home. These efforts approach film from the perspective of its encounter by viewers, as a 'sited' experience with identifiable physical, social and cultural contours, outside of which it ceases to exist as a dynamic force. I have suggested that to seek to understand the relations of film to the public sphere in these ways has validity, but ultimately a limited acknowledgement of the dynamism of the public critical status of film. While they constitute helpful shifts in film theory in general, to the emergent 'sub-field' of film and the public sphere in particular, these approaches fail to account for the intricate ways in which film relates to the public sphere. The circulation of film as a material object, and its intersection with other textual objects underwrite its relations to the public sphere. I have proposed a new understanding of film, primarily as a circulating text and as a 'producer' of a regime of texts, the combination of which, makes possible the formation of publics around it.

Although the study of film from a public sphere perspective, is hardly novel, it was until presently, made in relation to particular periods and contexts in the cinematic culture of Western Europe and North America. I have made my observations in the context of South Africa. These have yielded observations about film that show its centrality in public

engagements of ideas, the limits of political repression and lack of access and control of the apparatus notwithstanding. It has reversed the tendency to marginalise film from discussions of intellectual biographies from a pool of textual forms, which due to their relatively easy access, are likely to be used by the oppressed and marginalised to construct and contest ideas. In appreciating black-centred films from a public sphere perspective, the study has registered observations that have a profound bearing on reflections about films and the public sphere.

The capacity of film to stimulate critical public engagements, in spite of or because of the challenges prevalent in repressive and post-repressive periods, is salutary in two respects. Through the convergence of its strictly genre-specific capacities with other texts that it brings into being, film both works through and against the limits which repression imposes on social actors. Consequently, and due to the contingencies of its circulation and engagements, it retains the capacity to reverse, however briefly, the limits that the demands of capital and repressive political discourses place on social actors. The ongoing relations between film and secondary texts, allows film to expand the space of public engagements set up by the traditional public sphere of letters. This expansion makes possible the mobilisation of agency across the class, 'race', age and gender divides and interests. This is particularly pertinent in repressive and post-repressive periods, where the imperative of social justice underwrites social and political imaginaries in emergent democratic societies. Through its mobilisation of agency, film gives a measure of authenticity to what Negt and Kluge call 'the autonomous organisation of experience'.