

Perspectives on Orality in African Cinema

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Until the introduction to South Africa of broadcast television for the first time in January 1976, few South African universities taught media studies, though one or two courses in English literature (criticism) and drama (production and theory) had seeped into syllabi at some institutions by the end of the decade (see Davids 1980; Tomaselli 1980a; 1980b; 1985). Most courses, theoretical or production, were Eurocentric in origin, application, and approach. The notion of orality in cinema or television studies was not an issue, having only recently been elevated onto the South African academic agenda (Tomaselli and Sienaert 1990).

In this essay we attempt to accomplish three tasks. An overview of the relationship between literacy and orality with regard to teaching about cinema is the first. This section is followed by some general observations on Third Cinema in Africa and its incorporation of oral codes into its critical visual narratives, with reference to a film made by a Cameroonian director, *Afrique, Je Te Plumerai* (1991). We end with a case study of a particular South African film, *The Two Rivers* (1985), which we argue has been generally misunderstood by its critics because of its problematic attempt to mesh the codes of orality with those of the visual image. These three themes are framed within an overall call for the teaching of cinema in South Africa within both the literate and oral imperatives.

The New Moment of Visual Literacy

Visual literacy involves learning how to approach critical interpretations of visual messages (cinema, television, video, photography, graphics, and so on). A more comprehensive approach would examine how such texts are produced, and how different audiences make meaning of them. Discussion of visual literacy often occurs without reference to orality,

which is the other side of the coin as far as much African cinema is concerned.

The first move in the direction of visual literacy occurred under the guidance of Johan Grové of the white Transvaal Education Department (TED) in the late 1970s. His subsequent MA thesis, "The Theory and Practice of Film Study at Secondary School Level" (1981), a report on his experiment at six schools during the late '70s, offered an elitist "high culture" literary basis for what the TED formalistically calls "film study." This course was introduced in 1986.¹ Grové's semiotic (the study of how meaning is made) was followed by John van Zyl's accessible and useful, but equally semiotic ally formalist, *Imagewise* (1989), used by TED teachers. These studies gave way to a number of M.A. and Ph.D. theses then registered at various English-language universities under similar topics (Woodward 1992; Ballot 1993). Only one, however, by Tracey Hiltermann (1993), explicitly deals with issues of orality in relation to visual literacy.

Both Grové and van Zyl decontextualize their examples from the South African condition, thus ignoring local film, television, and theoretical debates. They also assume white Western literate readers and users both in their constructions of film audiences and as users of their writings. Because their examples are of Western film and Westernized viewers, they do not confront issues of orality or how primarily oral or even semi-literate cultures might make sense of film.

Lacking thus far in South African discussions on visual literacy, especially relating to cinema, film, and video, are debates on how this idea could be applied in South Africa to meet the demands of literate, semi-literate, and nonliterate students interacting through western-African and African orality-based cultures. This is a crucial point, as sight (that is, emphasis on the visual) fragments consciousness, situating the observer outside of what s/he sees. In contrast, sound incorporates, locating the observer at the center of an auditory world. Literate cultures, which stress the visual, store knowledge in written and other kinds of documents provided by recording and retrieval technologies. Oral cultures, in contrast, encode knowledge in the popular communal memory. The encounter between the two kinds of cultures through industrialization has resulted in imbalances which favor the dominance of the technological. As will be

¹ See Ballot 1991 for a critique.

argued below, African film makers are cultural intermediaries between the two forms of expression.

Most commentaries, e.g., van Zyl (1989) and the majority of authors in *Media Matters in South Africa* (Prinsloo and Criticos 1991), a conference proceedings which marked the “moment” of school media studies in South Africa, simply assume that approaches, discussions, and theories dominant in other parts of the world (mostly Anglo-Saxon and French), whether Marxist, positivist, or liberal-humanist, will automatically apply to all South African audiences and film makers. The fit between Western cinema and white South African audiences may be quite close, but the question remains on how oral-based communities and semi-literate viewers make sense of the same films.

The direct importation to Africa of methods, theories, ideas, and psychoanalytical assumptions developed in the First World is not without epistemological problems. These methods and theories assume particular sets of modern and post-modern conditions and periodizations not necessarily replicated in Africa or South Africa in quite the same ways (Muller and Tomaselli 1990). They often cannot account for ways in which African and Western/Eastern forms of expression have meshed, or for indigenous ways of knowing and making sense. Needed are theories that can account for the various, often widely different and original, African applications of imaging and recording technologies, and their resulting aesthetics.²

African interpretations of Western media, their rearticulation into different African contexts, and theoretical mixes that acknowledge the impact of traveling theories on our analytical tools similarly need explication and development. One route for such explanation is to study the way Third Cinema techniques have been employed by various African film makers, from Algeria in the North to South Africa in the South, as a way to indigenize our theoretical perspectives on film, video, and cinema.³

² See, for example, Tomaselli and Sienaert 1989 and Eke and Tomaselli 1992 on the South African oral-based storytelling found in films like *Songololo* and *The Two Rivers*, and videos like *The People's Poet* (1987), *I am Clifford Abrahams*, *This is Grahamstown* (1984) and Piet Draghoender's lament in *Kat River—The End of Hope* (1984).

³ See, e.g., Achebe et al. 1990.

Third Cinema

Third Cinema is a set of strategies developed by critical film makers in South America and North Africa (Solanas and Gettino 1976; Pines and Willemsen 1989). The ideas underlying Third Cinema have only very recently gained exposure in South Africa.⁴ First Cinema describes Hollywood entertainment; Second Cinema accounts for avant garde, personal, or auteur movies. Third Cinema is a cinema of resistance to imperialism and oppression, a cinema of emancipation; it articulates the codes of an essentially First World technology into indigenous aesthetics and mythologies. Since the 1980s, Third Cinema has been transplanted into other sites of resistance, including those in First world situations where class conflicts have taken on a racial/ethnic character.

Third Cinema is not a genre but rather a set of political strategies using film (and video) to articulate the experiences and hopes of the colonially oppressed. Its purpose, according to Solanas and Gettino (1976), is to create a “liberated space” by educating the oppressed. Much of critical African cinema is Third Cinema in nature. An example is Ousmane Sembene and Thierno Sow’s *Camp de Thiaroye* (1988), whose focus is the examination of the colonial experience.

African films, and much of Third Cinema, tend to be explicitly political. They start from the social premise that the Community is in the individual rather than that the Individual is in the community, as is the case with Western genre cinema. By “political” is meant the need to reconquer and to revise images of Western representations about Africa beamed back at the continent by international news agencies and cinemas. Critical African cinema is about the right of Africans to represent themselves to themselves, and to others, in cinema, television, and media in general. They contest mediated images recirculated to Africa from Western and Islamic neo-colonial centers. Jean-Marie Teno, a Cameroonian now living in Paris, characterizes the magnitude of the task through the words of his narration in *Afrique, Je Te Plumerai* (1991): “colonialism perpetrated cultural genocide.” The struggle of Africans is to overcome this genocide, and feelings of inferiority are its results. As one of his indignant but humorous characters complains: “Even when it comes to the number of seasons, we’re surpassed by Europe!”

⁴ Botha and Van Aswegen 1992; Maingard 1991; Tomaselli and Prinsloo 1992.

While class analysis may have dropped from sight in the First World metropolises of academic production following the breakup of the Soviet Union, it remains high on the agenda of most critical African film makers. This activity takes place in the context of the modern African state, which has largely disempowered indigenous cultures. As witnesses to their time, critical African film makers watch, record, probe, and participate in struggles for democracy and social and economic emancipation. The voice of the film maker is always clear, though sometimes the messages are encoded in allegory to avoid censorship. Fictions are preferred to documentary films. Documentaries, thought by governments and censors to be about “truth,” tend to attract more severe censorship.

Funding problems have led to a degree of insecurity among African film makers. It can take years to raise adequate finance for full-length films, and so the temptation is sometimes to cram as much into a single film as possible—the problem with *Afrique, Je Te Plumerai*, which intertwines about five narratives into one. But even here, such encoding derives from the Third Cinema theory, which holds that film makers should mobilize anything that works in educating “the masses” to the nature of their oppression under neo-colonialism—whether from the East or the West. Teno uses documentary, re-enactments, news footage, humor, drama and music, and monochrome. Direct and indirect narration, dialogue, and subtitles reflect the oral emphasis of African culture. This orality is further emphasized in that the storyline is advanced through a variety of different characters—as opposed to the single meta-narrator of conventional First Cinema. Music (songs, performances, lyrics), for example, is sometimes heavily foregrounded, operating as a narrative voice in its own right. The result, in the case of *Afrique*, is an entertaining post-modernist political protest film that retains the depth and irony of the oral style.

African Ontological “Grammars”

Third Cinema practitioners thus rearticulate and localize Western-invented technologies in the service of African themes, stories, forms of oral storytelling, and cultural expression. Africa participates in ontologies that suggest the generation of new and alternate visual grammars, different from those found in more industrialized societies. These draw on linguistic structures that have no grammar for dealing with things that exist

quite without relation to other things. African languages, unlike languages that have emerged from industrial economies, describe a world consisting of more than objects. In an important way, their grammar (especially when it has not been subjected to the attentions of European educational specialists), has a place for qualifying something in terms of its relatedness to the other things, persons, and animals around it.

African Third Cinema directors are part of their societies, in relating to and exploring everyday activities. Editing and encoding in African films reflect this common sense in which the world is interconnected through language. The writer in *Afrique*, for example, works at her typewriter in the middle of a busy street, not in seclusion, in the isolation of the Western artist or *littérateur*. She is part of the everyday life about which she is writing and which surrounds her. This image raises questions about the nature of Africanity and its emphasis on Being, on totality, on an integrated world not separated into dualisms—counterposed to a world where the Western artist tends to hide away from “life” in seclusion while “creating.”

These scientifically derived mind/body separations that characterize Western art are further sharpened by the move from orality to literacy. The result is to drastically reduce reliance by the young literate educated on their oral elders for information. This process of enculturation into the industrialized technological world results in the foregrounding of individualist over communal activities and thought, leading to a disruption of traditional generational forms of respect.

Ethnographic film and video may also be inadequate to the task of reintegrating the Subject with the Object, since it tends to separate the visible world of actual behavior from the invisible spiritual realm, which often remains real and concrete to their African subjects. Africans may make no distinctions between the material and the spiritual. It is not an accident, then, that much of early African philosophy was most sensitively recorded by a few sympathetic European missionaries and theologians (e.g., Tempels 1959). In visual terms, this task of recording and articulating African philosophies has now fallen to African film makers. The integration of the spiritual and the material are partly found in the oral nature that many African societies have sustained through the centuries of colonization and Westernization.

Teno's film, *Afrique*, which shows how the original oral culture of Cameroon has been influenced by writing, is driven by the thorny question

of how to steer Africa out of its cultural vulnerability—a vulnerability that has led to its apparent helplessness and internal repression by the black elite apparachiks of global capital. Writing brought with it a new form of oppression—that regulated by the modern state bureaucracy. But African directors, in decolonizing Western images of Africa presented to Africans, face the problem of Hollywood-hooked audiences and escapist entertainment-seeking in their own countries. Thus, while African governments mostly ban films made by their critical citizens, they also become artistic fodder for First World film festival circuits. As such, the paradox of Third African Cinema is that its makers act as cultural intermediaries germinating oral and visual styles and themes that are currently stored in exile, waiting for appropriate conditions before returning home.

We now turn to a South African case study. Here we try to identify the voices encoded in the film, and the degree to which the “traditionally” oral predominates.

Case Study: *The Two Rivers*

The Venda poet Rashaka Ratshitanga takes us on a “journey” through the history of his people’s dispossession by the “Boers,” and later apartheid South Africa. The film opens with white scrolled captions on a black background:

The narrator of this film, Rashaka Ratshitanga lives in Venda, a rural area of South Africa. Recently the South African government declared Venda an “independent state” in accordance with their policy of apartheid. For his opposition to this policy, Rashaka has been detained incommunicado for a prolonged period by security police. Rashaka spent twenty years as a migrant labourer in Johannesburg and returned to Venda in 1975. He is a writer and a poet.

Later on Ratshitanga says to the camera, “Let me take you on a journey into the heartland of this country following the course of the two rivers which are now forging the destiny of my people.”

Historically, *The Two Rivers* is the story of the Venda people and their subjugation by European colonists. We are presented with an idyllic picture of Vendaland prior to the coming of the Europeans. Rashaka

mentions the various conflicts between the Vendas and their neighbors, as well as the Boers, and indicates that until the British arrival in the late nineteenth century when they overthrew the Venda King, they were a stable and independent people.

Themes of *Two Rivers*

- the two rivers—symbolic—a white river of white culture and a black river of black culture, which according to Rashaka, merge in Johannesburg.
- the dispossession of Venda people by South Africa represented in the loss of the land; and the death of certain Venda customs such as the age-group initiation rites. Ratshitanga refers to himself as one of the last participants in the boys' adolescent initiation rites.
- the South African bantustan policy—Venda was one of the so-called independent homelands. Ratshitanga questions the meaning of independence for the Vendas, pointing cryptically to the “signs” of independence: Western economic colonization (Kentucky Fried Chicken); a brewery industry—ironically one of the crippling outcomes of colonization is a high rate of alcoholism among the colonized; the wasteland that Venda has become; and poor housing. He also points to the complicity of Africans in their own disempowerment—the leaders of all the homelands are implicated in this role.
- migratory labor to Johannesburg represented by the emergence of a new black/African culture or city—Soweto. This resulted in the loss of children and human resources from Vendaland—people drawn to the glitter and illusory promise of jobs in South African urban areas. This migration began after the 1930s. Ratshitanga names himself as one of these migrants.

- the conflict of cultures that is a prominent theme in the writings of African and other colonized peoples. Here there are two major conflicts: a) the initial European/African cultural conflict; and b) the new African (Sowetan)/white South African (Johannesburg) cultural conflict.
- the general violence of apartheid—Africans as victims and perpetrators of violence.
- the role of the emerging African youth (particularly in the urban areas) in the new South African society.

At another level, *The Two Rivers* is also the story of Rashaka Ratshitanga—the man, the poet. This story, however, is quite dislocated as Rashaka the narrator tends to get lost and separated from the film's narrative. The result is a tension of subjectivities between the oral telling by Ratshitanga and the visual recordings of the crew. Ratshitanga, instead of offering an interior participatory point of view, offers an exterior observational perspective of his story and that of "his people." On more than one occasion, for example, Ratshitanga undermines his own intention and presence as storyteller by walking out of frame (Maingard 1986:22). The camera seems, in parts, then, to sometimes follow a narrative thread separate from that of the narrator, especially when he is talking about Johannesburg.

Why does this film seem aligned with the apartheid government's perspective, as many foreign anti-apartheid evaluators have claimed (Tomaselli 1992)? Or does *The Two Rivers* subvert language in order to communicate certain political messages? Ratshitanga does not make any overt anti-government statements. In fact, the word "apartheid" is rarely mentioned. On the one hand, this is consistent with his literary character as the chronicler, the teller of truths, the objective narrator, the *imbongi*. On the other hand, this objectivity is sometimes undermined when Ratshitanga treats such sensitive areas as the meaning of independence for the Vendas; or when he makes provocative statements about Soweto being a city of violence; or when he degrades the issue of the Anglo-Boer war (1899-1902); or when he accuses the British and the Boers of being the dispossessors of the Vendas. The director's choice of film shots/images to associate with some of these statements points to a subtext that perhaps

neither the government's censors nor some anti-apartheid viewers could identify.

The problem in identifying the political position of the film stems from the (erratic) authority given Ratshitanga by the film crew complemented by incorporation of "dominant" apartheid discourses. The narrator, as do the film makers, fail to develop clear visual and verbal oppositional discourses through which to articulate their message. As an exterior representation of the narrator's self, *The Two Rivers* tends to relegate its subjects to silence, preferring the film makers' direct address perspective. Jae Maingard (1986:35) concludes that: "It would seem that the film maker [Mark Newman?] has wanted to elevate rural, ritualistic societies above any other form of society and in doing so has inscribed his own romantic notions of such societies into the film, with the help of the narrator, who represents a similar view." This perhaps explains the insertion of the seemingly arbitrary female initiation rite (women's dance) into the film. This perspective of a "naive" rural society supports the Western romantic view of a pristine Africa, innocent, unsophisticated. As Maingard (1986:37) puts it, "*The Two Rivers* is a predominantly imperative text." It is the imperative, seemingly non-political position adopted by the film makers, despite Ratshitanga's harassment by the Security Police, that led some audiences to conclude that the film was progovernment, and therefore uncritical of apartheid. The film makers' deliberate decision against using the word "apartheid," however, does not make the film pro-apartheid propaganda (see Steenveld 1990:132). This assertion will be clarified below as we try to identify the codes of the *imbongi* and the film makers' attempts to translate them from the oral to the visual medium.

The *Imbongi* as Narrator

Ratshitanga is a poet, a literary critic. Therefore, he is the most appropriate person to tell the story of his people. In traditional African societies, Ratshitanga would be the *griot* or *imbongi*, that is, an oral historian. He indicates this status by suggesting to the audience that his name signifies the "one who tells the truth." *The Two Rivers*, then, if rather tortuously, is trying to emulate the codes of the *imbongi*, and to function as a praise poem, with the poem (the interaction of the oral, visual and performative) suggesting a way forward. The confluence of the previously

separate black and white cultures in the big cities can result in a new stream that could show the way to the future. This is the film's message.

As the chronicler of his people's lives and stories, Ratshitanga must document what he sees. But he does not necessarily have to take any positions, or make any value judgments or critical comments. It is in this sense that the ideological position in the film seems amorphous. In order to find any ideological leanings, we must examine the subtext of the film that often emerges in the moments when he asks what appear to be rhetorical questions. A typical example is the questioning of what independence means for the Vendas; another is at the end of the film when he wonders whether the new African youth will hear their people's cry from the past. For Ratshitanga, *The Two Rivers* is also about the rewriting or reconstruction of a people's history to incorporate the Venda voice into the history of South Africa. Whereas the textbooks provided by the South African apartheid government tended to erase African voices in the telling of their own stories, Ratshitanga attempts to inject that voice into the "telling" in this film. This is his story as well as that of his people.

Both Ratshitanga's and the Venda stories are linked by his personal experiences, which parallel those of his people (or kinspeople). It is therefore not surprising that in his telling of this story some romanticism emerges. He rewrites (retells) Venda history to incorporate the view that Vendas were a politically viable society before the coming of the Europeans, and that it was actually the Europeans who destroyed Venda civilization. Part of the method used in the rewriting of this history is the incorporation of some cultural aspects—the initiation rites, the oral performance of the people's story by the elders, his own use of oral narrative devices as in, for example, the use of proverbs. In fact, in reconstructing the Venda story, Ratshitanga also undermines that of the Boers, indicating that for the Vendas the Boer war was like a fight between two dogs over stolen meat.

Ratshitanga's function as the chronicler, or oral historian, is often underscored by the various changes of his narrative character. When we first see him at the start of the film, he addresses the audience as the narrator. In one scene, he is without his glasses. A few minutes later, facing the audience, he puts on a pair of glasses that symbolically provide more sight (to see beyond the "ordinary") and perhaps more insight into the life of his people. In this sense, he becomes our (Western?) magnifying lens in our quest for knowledge about the Vendas. In addition, to be consistent

with his role as the poet, chronicler, and perhaps visionary of this narrative, Ratshitanga must assume a personality appropriate for any given context during the course of his narration. As such, his change of clothing, for example, on the trip to Johannesburg, becomes an attempt to reflect the environment, a change in world view and culture. It is also a metaphor for cultural transformation, here for Westernization. Ratshitanga symbolically clothes himself in Western values, and becomes a paradigm of the merging two rivers. He is simultaneously an African and a Western. In conclusion, the film's promotional blurb states:

The *Two Rivers* is a rural Black South African's perspective on the history of his people, the colonial era, the early Apartheid era and the present day. It is also an interwoven tapestry of the political, economic and cultural forces present in the South African society and as such fills in much of the background detail and texture required for a fuller understanding of our current situation.

As we have argued above, *The Two Rivers* is actually an uneven interaction of subjectivities (Ratshitanga's, the film's crew), and as such, is a rather disjointed "tapestry." However, the film does represent an experiment in providing points of confluence of the two rivers at a variety of levels:

- a) the two rivers of "black" and "white" cultures,
- b) the two rivers of expression—orality and film,
- c) the two rivers of "white" and "black" histories,
- d) the two rivers of written and oral expressions,
- e) and the two rivers of urban and rural civilizations.

Secondary Orality

What both Teno and Newman/Ratshitanga are offering are attempts at analysis through secondary orality. To paraphrase Marshall McLuhan (1964:57): these directors are attempting to speak to both Western and African audiences through a "technologized extension of our consciousness," drawing on the codes of orality, literacy, and visuality.

The spoken word was the first technology that permitted humans to separate themselves from their environment and understand it in a new way. In the scene where one of Teno's characters is typing in the middle of a

street, he is calling attention to the new form of meaning exchange facilitated by writing and mechanized writing technology. The typist is part of the street scene but also excluded/alienated from the passers-by. Teno, therefore, encourages the audience to interrogate reality as it is perceived by drawing attention to the character's location in the film's narrative as well as to perception as the subject of the film. By filming the scene in this way, Teno simultaneously extends our consciousness by overlaying the primarily oral and the literate with secondary orality. Films and television heralded the age of secondary (electro-chemical and electronic) orality, and thereby the recuperation of a modified form of primary orality through audio and visual recording technologies. Both *The Two Rivers* and *Afrique* thus attempt to intertwine the oral, the literate, and the visual—resulting in a new form of secondary orality that does not derive from the dualisms driving the conceptions of industrialized cultures.

In all the films and videos mentioned in our analysis, the narrative revolves around spoken language rather than visual conventions. The editing strategy used by Hayman on *I am Clifford Abrahams, This is Grahamstown* follows the logic of Abraham's verbal telling of his story. In *Kat River*, illiterate Piet Draghoender's lament is in stark contrast to the rest of the colored peasant farming community's relatively literate culture. Both *Songololo* and *The People's Poet* use music, images, documentary realism, post-modernist editing techniques, interviews, news footage, captions sculptured in terms of the encompassing film frame, and composition—all subordinated to the spoken, the storytelling of Mbuli and Mhlope, all of which comes over as a politicized form of music television (MTV).

All of the films use oral storytelling to teach audiences not just about past history, but about contemporary processes impacting them directly, as well as about those that can be expected in the future. Especially in *Afrique*, *The Two Rivers*, *Songololo*, and *The People's Poet*, the storytellers practice the craft of the *imbongi* or *griot*. The *imbongi* links the community to its past, present, and future.

The storytellers in the above films are in some ways similar to the pre-modern European idea of bards. A bard was a mediator of language who composed his stories out of the available linguistic resources of the culture. The result was a series of consciously structured messages that served to communicate to a society a confirming, reinforcing version of themselves (Fiske and Hartley 1979:86).

Modern African bards, *imbongis* or storytellers, have only residues of existing “traditional societies” to reinforce. Their societies no longer exist in their original forms, though sometimes quite marked traces of traditional values remain, as do (receding) elements of primary orality. Whereas primarily oral cultures elaborate their stories within the epic form and extraordinary heroes and fantasies, the *imbongis* in the above films are more concerned with cultural loss, oppression, colonization, and emancipation.

Imbongis using the media of modernity tend to offer more concrete explications, communicating through a more deliberate and self-conscious orality, facilitated through media technologies. Here, we recall Ratshitanga’s direct address to the camera and his use of the spectacles to make a point about “seeing” beyond the surface of things. Mzwakhe Mbuli and Gcina Mhlope similarly speak to audiences personally, involving them in their stories, provoking memories of primary orality through the use of metaphors, alliteration, repetitions, and mnemonic devices.

The words of the *imbongi* resist the Western attachment to things and concrete existence. The films discussed here constitute an attempt to arrest the process of exteriority, where consciousness breaks into the mind/body duality. Ratshitanga is trying to recover communality, but in a new way, through the meshing of Western and indigenous cultures, wherein the confluence of two (cultures) rivers can join into a new mighty, just, and mutually acceptable direction. *The Two Rivers*, far from being apartheid propaganda, is rather a plea for integration.

Conclusion

The new study of visual media in some, mostly Indian and white, South African schools should not be a simple transposition from experiments that might have shown signs of success in Europe, Australia, or the United States. Some cinema and television studies at South African universities have already succumbed to this temptation by simply transporting Screen Theory as imposed by the journal *Screen*, during the 1970s and early ‘80s, directly into their uneasy attempts to understand South African cinema.

While such theory and analytical experience is fundamentally important in developing courses on visual literacy in South Africa, local conditions and frames of reception and production should not be summarily

ignored. The differences between black urban school children and black rural peasant children may be even greater than the differences that pertain between black and white urban children. One adheres primarily to the oral; the other to a mixture of oral and visual cultures, though both are increasingly moving through worlds of visual images.

As the comedic singer (*griot* or *imbongi*) in Teno's film ironically puts the case for Africa: "When Africans will make their own films, I'll go back to the movies." Africans *are* making their own films. The range of styles across the continent is astonishing, while some lack style altogether. The real question becomes how to reach African audiences. In South Africa, this translates not only to the challenge presented by the restructuring of our racially, legislatively, and spatially fractured educational systems, but also to the problem of teaching about the visual media in multicultural classrooms in such a way that the already visually literate learn from those who still possess the skills, practices, interpretive frameworks, and values of orality, and vice versa.

Systematic research on how African film makers and audiences make sense of films and television remains to be put on the academic research agenda. Only then will authentic Southern African identities—reflecting the meshing of the different histories of language, communication, and expression of its inhabitants—begin to emerge.⁵

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