

KEYAN TOMASELLI AND CULTURAL STUDIES IN SOUTH AFRICA.

by

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The history of the emergence of Cultural Studies in South Africa has not as yet been written. Given the short duration of its formation, approximately twenty-five years, it may be too early to undertake such a complex, and perhaps contentious, project. One of the difficulties may possibly be in outlining and delineating the prefiguration of the pre-history of Cultural Studies in South African intellectual and cultural history. The other difficulty may reside in locating its origins. It is very possible that Keyan Tomaselli may be designated in the upcoming history of Cultural Studies in South Africa as the modern intellectual author of its emergence and formation. This matter of intellectual origins is an issue that history and posterity will have to settle. I for one have no doubt as to who will be designated as the originator, through borrowing and appropriation from England, in South Africa of this new intellectual discipline or cultural formation.

What I take to be not in dispute is the central and seminal role of Keyan Tomaselli in the intellectual metamorphoses of South African Cultural Studies over the past two decades. The founding of *Critical Arts: A Journal of Media Studies* in 1980 (from 1992 known as *Critical Arts: a Journal for Cultural Studies*) is coterminous with the awakening of the historical consciousness that the practice of Cultural Studies may facilitate the ideological possibility of unhinging the historical blockages that apartheid had imposed on the country. This monumental undertaking is evident on practically every page of *Critical Arts*. As editor of the journal from its inception (in its early years co-edited with John van Zyl), Tomaselli alludes to this undertaking in the Editorial of the second issue of the journal which was on Censorship in South Africa: "This journal is concerned with the arts, media and communication in a Third World context, and follows a paradigm similar to a number of other journals in related disciplines. The direction followed by the Editorial Board is committed to study [a] of process and form from the point of view of popular culture. Perhaps we have clung to our elitist chimeras for so long that those of us involved in the performing arts, film, television, etc. are unaware of the underlying principles which structure out narrow vision of the world" (vol. 1 no. 2, June 1980). This historical trajectory has been followed to the present, with some modifications necessitated by the imperatives of history. A partial listing of the contributors to this issue is indicative of the high quality that was to characterize many of the subsequent issues: Nadine Gordimer, Andre Brink, J. M. Coetzee.

Although *Critical Arts* was founded at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, then relocated to Rhodes University in Grahamstown within a few years, it was from 1985 as the intellectual organ of the Contemporary Cultural Studies Unit (from the early 1990s known as the Centre for Cultural and Media Studies) that it had most profound influence in the country, especially among academic intellectuals. A listing of the themes of each particular issue of the journal is necessary in order to indicate its intellectual avant-garde position in its struggle against apartheid that brought into being a 'New' South Africa: South African Cinema; Censorship in South Africa; Drama and Theatre in South Africa; Visual Anthropology; Performance in South Africa; Press and Broadcasting in Africa; Steyn Commission/Breaker Morant; Cinema and the Third World; Popular Culture and Performance in Africa; English Studies in Transition; Popular Memory; Aesthetics of Resistance; Documentary; Production of Popular Knowledge; 'Black' South African Performance Revisited; Education, Capital and Discourse; Women Represented; New Approaches to the Study of Media and the Arts in South Africa; Education, Censorship and Democracy; Broadcasting/ Telecommunications Policy for South Africa; Media Studies; African Cinema; Media Education; Culture and Media; Recuperating the Sun; African Media; Asia/Africa/Australia: Negotiating Cultural Boundaries; Identity and Popular Culture; and Policy: Governance and Culture.

Some of the issues of the journal, for instance English Studies in Transition and Recuperating the Sun, were defining moments in South African academic studies. They other opened or re-opened in a fresh way unfamiliar epistemological territories; they redefined in a new way historicity in relation to the present; they narrowed in a consequential way the space between intellectual struggle and political struggle. This class struggle in theory, at least at a particular moment of their history, was a reflection of the influence of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham (at one time had Stuart Hall as its Director) on both *Critical Arts* and the Centre for Cultural and Media Studies (likewise Keyan Tomaselli was its director). In other words, on the eve of the fall of apartheid, *Critical Arts* was engaging itself with the intersection of Marxism, race, representation and feminism in the attempt to create new epistemologies. Given the seminal influence of Stuart Hall on Keyan Tomaselli, in all probability the South African would subscribe to the following formulation by the British intellectual: "Cultural studies has multiple discourses; it has a number of different histories. It is a whole set of formations; it has its own different conjunctures and moments in the past. . . It had many trajectories; many people had and have different trajectories through it; it was constructed by a number of different methodologies and theoretical positions, all of them in contention. . . This is a way of opening the question of the 'worldliness' of cultural studies, to borrow a term from Edward Said" ("Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies", in

Cultural Studies , eds. Lawrence Grossberg et al [1992]). It is this openness of Cultural Studies that Keyan Tomaselli has made it its mainstay in South Africa. It is because of the very openness of its nature that other trajectories of South African Cultural Studies will be proposed by others. This is in the very nature of South Africa today.

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