

### **Richard Green in South African Film: Forging Creative New Directions.**

Keyan G. Tomaselli & Richard Green.  
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In an illuminating article about the relationship between creative work(ers) and the academy, John L. Jackson (541) asks: “What does it mean to take academic knowledge production seriously as a site/process of actual production”? Keyan Tomaselli and Richard Green’s collaboration *Richard Green in South African Film* offers a response to such questions—even doubts—about creative production as academic work; about the unity of practice and theory in praxis; and about the personal, introspective value of creative work for the practitioner and their audiences.

Tomaselli is an internationally recognised expert in South African media studies and film studies, while Green is a decades-long veteran of the South African film industry (and was awarded a lifetime achievement award by the Jozi Film Festival in 2020). With their extraordinary book, Tomaselli and Green write from complementary positions across the false—yet stubborn—‘academia’ and ‘industry’ divide to present a scholarly and accessible text that explores the ways in which theory and practice are coterminous in praxis. The book offers an important, insightful contribution to film-based practice-lead or practice-based research in South Africa. Tomaselli is himself no stranger to film praxis, having collaborated with Lionel Ngakane (as Green did) earlier in his career, while Green came to academia later in life when he pursued his MFA at AFDA. The book is the end result of Green’s MFA obtained at AFDA under Tomaselli’s supervision. As Green describes it, in this book “I am telling Tomaselli’s story; he is telling mine, via the dialogue and the writing, like two planets circling each other, but not actually connecting at the time [...] My and Tomaselli’s respective orbits eventually intersected via AFDA in the mid-2010s” (71).

Tomaselli articulates the underlying thesis of the book thus: “text-based film theorists write far too much theory while professionals who live theory in practice through production write too little of it” (1). Tomaselli and Green work towards the conclusion that “where practitioners enunciate theory in the doing, theorists write theory in the viewing” (7). Methodologically, the book deploys an interview method developed by American publication *Cineaste* (13). In addition, the notion of autoethnography and Green’s “lived practice”, which is duly shaped by a politically-founded “principle of resistance” (11), further inform the research approach. Green shares a number of anecdotes to crystallise some of his observations. As Sean Cubitt (5) confirms, the anecdote is “a viable and indeed vital form of evidence”, the “unique instance” that holds meaning-making value, and offers a particular depth of revelation (8). At times, this book reminded me of Kenneth Anger’s *Hollywood Babylon* and Mark Harris’s *Pictures of a Revolution* (2008). In recounting his interactions, agreements and differences with other stakeholders in the entertainment industry, Green is much more introspective, sincere and humanist than Anger, while Tomaselli’s writing teases out meaningful connections between artists and contexts in a manner similar to Harris.

The first chapter of *Richard Green in South African Film*, “Writing the Selves”, provides the framework for the book and identifies productive tensions between autobiography, biography and memoir (which becomes a thread throughout the authors’ sustained self-reflexivity). The second and third chapters provide a historical and industrial context of media in South Africa during apartheid, in which key concepts familiar to scholars (e.g. national cinema, Third Cinema) are revisited. Chapter Four is Green’s first chapter as author, and offers Green’s memories of childhood and early adulthood as he details his inspirations for becoming interested in filmmaking (83). The chapter also details his forays into the SABC and M-Net. Here, Green duly acknowledges and aligns with Phyllis Dannhauser’s (vi) autoethnographic opus about “a filmmaker, storyteller and creative practitioner who found her voice, and her place in academia, through story”.

In Chapters Five and Six, Green details his creative work as South Africa slowly transitioned towards democracy, and in Chapter Seven he announces M-Net’s New Directions “as a bridge to democracy” (70). In the eighth chapter, Green moves beyond his regular position of producer to take on a number of creative roles in making his horror film *Tokoloshe: The Calling*

(2019). Green claims that “[the] film was my therapy” (187), and he refers to Carl Jung, his relationship with Manie van Rensburg, and his upbringing to reflect on his filmmaking as simultaneously creative work and the work of the psyche.

In Chapter Nine, Tomaselli takes his cue from Green’s emphasis on the psychological meaning and value of his creative labour to further explore what he calls the primary interior story (Green’s) and secondary exterior story that is Green’s relationship with Van Rensburg. From here, Tomaselli goes into explicitly Jungian terrain in making sense of what certain South African filmmakers and their films may (or may not) accomplish in terms of a Jungian approach to the moving image in a local context. Here he also draws on important contemporary work, specifically philosopher Martin P Rossouw’s scholarship on the ‘cinemakeover’ (215).

Unlike some other recent publications on South African cinemas, this book features a name index, film index and subject index, as well as a section titled “Richard Green Filmography”. In addition, the book features a generous and candid foreword by filmmaker and educator Ntshavheni Wa-Luruli. Finally, the book closes with a brief postscript by the wonderfully critical film director Andrew Worsdale (best known for 1987’s *Shot Down*), whose erudite email correspondence with the authors features in some sections in the book.

*Richard Green in South African Film* has an understandably strong introspective and psychological angle as a ‘coming-to-terms’ with notions of artistic expression; creative limitation (whether internal or external); processes of creative and professional validation; and the status of being an outsider. To casually borrow from Jung, Tomaselli and Green’s meeting was a moment of synchronicity to produce this important book. As Jung (155) writes in *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*: “the human psyche is the womb of all the sciences and the arts [...] We may expect psychological research on the one hand to explain the formation of a work of art, and on the other to reveal the factors that make a person artistically creative”. Green’s story is his personal narrative, but is also the story of how South African filmmakers navigated the strategic benefits and suppressive mechanism of the entertainment industry. Tomaselli and Green deftly weave the micro (personal) and macro (collective, industrial) threads together to offer insights into individual filmmakers (Green, yes, but also Manie van Rensburg); their industrial and socio-political contexts; and attempts to reinvigorate South African moving image storytelling (vis-à-vis

M-Net’s New Directions initiative). The title of the publication could have been *South African Film through Richard Green*.

The book speaks to a number of gaps and paucities in current South African scholarship on film theory and filmmaking by focusing on the dynamics of theory and creative practice as primarily centered in the figure of the film producer. Traditionally, the idea of the auteur remains most closely linked with the position of director; see, for instance, Mary Harrod’s illuminating assessment of Céline Sciamma’s praxis as self-narration through autofiction (2023). The book’s focus on the producer crystallises the signature of the producer “on his overall body of output” (7) and presents “a theory of producing from below”, as Tomaselli described it the book’s launch at the Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) on 5 October 2023. As evidenced by specific chapters, this publication is refreshing in its methodological diversity, as well as in its exploration of filmmaker psychologies where one of the filmmakers (Green) is himself present and accounted for.

As a publication that uses a personal narrative to reflect on praxis, art and industry in South Africa, *Richard Green in South African Film* finds a home alongside Martin Botha’s books about and with Afrikaans film directors Jans Rautenbach (*Jans Rautenbach—Dromer, Baanbreker en Auteur* 2006) and Manie van Rensburg (*Kronieken van Zuid-Afrika—De Films van Manie van Rensburg* 1997). I would have liked to read Green’s thoughts on additional, important South African films such as Gavin Hood’s *A Reasonable Man* (1999). I would also have appreciated further information on Green’s own articulation of his work and psyche through a Jungian lens in relation to his own engagement with Jungian literature (which Jung and post-Jungians did Green himself read?) *Richard Green in South African Film* (2023) is likely to become a primary source for scholars interested in South African media history and film history, and also in diverse practice-informed research methodologies.

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